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SERMONS

BY

H. P. LIDDON, D.D., D.C.L.,

CANON OF ST. PAUL'S.

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Sermons

BY THE REV. H. P. LIDDON, D.D., D.C.L.,

Canon of St. Paul's.

THE DISOBEDIENT PROPHET.*

"And when the prophet that brought him back from the way heard thereof, he said: It is the man of God, who was disobedient unto the word of the Lord."—1 KINGS xiii. 26.

WE have before us the remark of the old prophet of Bethel when he heard of the tragical death of the younger man of God who came out of Judah, and who had disobeyed God's command by returning to eat and drink at Bethel. The history has just been read to us in the First Lesson, and its various bearings on questions of conduct which are constantly presenting themselves will warrant our reconsidering it.

Now, let us observe, first of all, the great professional and spiritual eminence of this young prophet who came out of Judah. Josephus went so far as to think that he was even the great prophet Iddo, but Iddo seems to have outlived Jeroboam, as he certainly wrote a history of the reign of Rehoboam's successor, Ahijah. The name of this prophet is, in point of fact, not recorded. He belongs to that great company of men and women of all ages and countries who have contributed much to the service of God, much to the well-being of their fellow-creatures, while on earth. It is only remembered what they did and not who they were. But as to his high standing

* Preached in St. Paul's Cathedral, on Sunday afternoon, August 29th, 1886.

among his fellows there can be no question. This would appear, first of all, from the Divine mission with which he was entrusted. Jeroboam, as you remember, had conducted to a successful issue the revolt of the ten tribes against the house of David, then represented by the obstinate and foolish young king Rehoboam. The prophets who, under Divine direction, supported Jeroboam in this enterprise meant, no doubt, that the ten tribes while becoming politically independent of the reigning house at Jerusalem, should not depart from their accustomed religious belief and practice, and thus no dishonour would be done to the Mosaic revelation, and the religious unity of the country would still be unimpaired. But with Jeroboam, what he would have called practical politics—meaning the politics which had made him a very important person indeed,—came first, and the interests of religion afterwards—a long way afterwards. Jeroboam thought that if his subjects were to continue, after the manner of their fathers, to make periodical pilgrimages to Jerusalem, it could not but be a source of danger to the political fabric which he had just built up with so much care and labour. If the ten tribes were to remain a separate state they must, so he thought, have virtually a separate religion, and if they had not such a religion ready to hand it must be invented for them. Accordingly Jeroboam fell back upon the experience which he had gained during his enforced exile at the court of Egypt as the guest of King Shishak. In early and imperfect conditions of religion, religion is apt to be chiefly, if not exclusively, valued as a source of temporal blessings, as a security against temporal evils. In Egypt the productive powers lodged by Almighty God in the natural world were supposed to be phases of the Divine life itself, conceived as of something inseparable from nature, and thus they were worshipped as Divine, and under such figures as that of the bull Apis at Memphis, and of the calf Mnevis at Heliopolis or On. One of these supplied Jeroboam with his new idea of representing the divinity as especially a sort of agricultural providence, thus suited to the taste of farmers and herdsmen like the people of

the Northern tribes. Accordingly, a golden figure, probably of the bull of Mnevis, was set upon the hill-top at Dan, the northernmost town of Israel, at the foot of Mount Hermon, and another was set up at Bethel in the extreme south, within a mile and a half of the frontier of Benjamin. They were, no doubt, explained to the Israelites as merely representing their old religious belief, only under a new and more attractive aspect, while possibly, in defiance of the Mosaic revelation, an appeal would have been made, when likely to succeed, to the learning and thoughtfulness of the Egyptian priesthood, who constituted a sort of university professoriate at On and elsewhere. Jeroboam, like other innovators, could not stop where he would, where policy might dictate. He had to make changes in the priesthood, as well as in the representation of the Divine Being. The tribe of Levi, so we gather from the Chronicles and from the Egyptian monuments, even when scattered throughout the ten revolted tribes, remained true to the house of David, and Jeroboam forthwith consecrated priests out of all the other tribes, from the mass of the people and by a rite of his own appointment. He evidently thought all such matters of no great consequence in themselves, and he had no hesitation in dealing with them as the political circumstances of the moment might seem to require. Certainly, Jeroboam knew what he was doing when he fixed on Bethel as one of the two scenes of his novel experiment. Bethel could at least rival Jerusalem in its association with the history of the patriarchs. Near Bethel, Abraham had pitched his tent; at Bethel, Jacob, sleeping on one of the limestone boulders at the top of the hill for his pillow, had seen the vision of the ladder that reached from earth to heaven, and had heard the promise: "In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed." Of Bethel, which previously bore the heathenish name of Luz, Jacob had said: "This is none other than the House of God: this is the gate of heaven." At Bethel he had received his second name, so full of deep religious significance, the name of Israel. The pillar which he set up at Bethel, on the spot where he heard the voice of God, was the first begin-

ning of the sanctuary of later days, and the assemblies which were held there under the Judges, at a time when Jerusalem itself was still a pagan Canaanite town, show the religious importance which attached to Bethel. Jeroboam, then, was appealing to associations among the most sacred in the early history of the race—associations, the religious value of which, no child of the patriarchs could possibly gainsay.

And the religious interest thus attaching to Bethel was borne out by its situation. It embraced within its circuit two hills, on the easternmost of which Jeroboam raised the golden figure of Mnevis, with the address : "Behold the God which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." From this point the eye commands the mountains around, beyond Jerusalem, even the dome of the mosque of Omar ; while to the east the deep gorge of the Jordan, and the hills of Gilead and Moab rising out of it with abrupt beauty to the desert ridges beyond, form a prospect which might well impress the feelings and the imaginations of men on a great historical occasion. Immediately beneath the altar of the calf was the opening of the defile of Michmash, leading down to the valley of Ai, the scene of Jonathan's unselfish heroism, the scene of Joshua's first failure and of his decisive victory. Here it was that the new king of Israel, in splendid royal array, surrounded by his court and by his army, with the new ministers of the new religion in attendance around him, stood before the altar of the calf Mnevis to offer the inaugural sacrifice. Plainly, to intrude upon him at such a moment with a message denouncing his work, and foretelling its destruction, was to risk certain death. Such a mission could only be entrusted to, and undertaken by, a man of remarkable courage and of robust convictions.

And thus the high character and capacity of the nameless prophet of Judah appears, secondly, from the manner in which he discharged his mission. He was instructed to accept no hospitality at the hands of the men of Bethel, the object being to bring home forcibly to them the conviction that

they were no longer in religious communion with the true representatives of the religion of Moses: and he was not to return by the way he had come, a precept intended either to symbolise perpetual progress as the law of the prophetic life, or to lessen the risk of his capture by the emissaries of Jeroboam, or simply to test his obedience. In order to return speedily from Bethel by the northern road, the prophet seems to have approached it by a circuitous route: he seems to have struck his way across the hills east of Jerusalem, then to have made his way by bypaths through the ranges which slope down toward the Jordan in eastern Benjamin, and then, turning up the valley of Ai and through the defile of Michmash, to have appeared without any previous warning before the astonished king. What followed is well known. Jeroboam had mounted the platform around the altar to burn incense before the golden calf, when the prophet rushed forward and apostrophised, not the king, but the altar. He would show that his mission was directed, not against a man, but against a false system. "O altar, altar, thus saith the Lord, Behold a child shall be born unto the house of David, Josiah by name, and upon thee shall he offer the priests of the high places that burn incense upon thee, and men's bones shall be burnt upon thee." He added an immediate sign that the remote prophecy would be fulfilled. The altar was rent, the half-consumed offerings were spilt upon the ground—the result, in all probability, of the sudden shock of an earthquake. The indignant Jeroboam attempted to seize the audacious prophet, but in the very act the king's hand was paralysed, and only restored at the prayer of his intended victim. When violence had failed, Jeroboam tried courtesy. Would the prophet return with the king to his palace, and accept the gift which was ordinarily given after distinguished service to members of the sacred order? The prophet refused. He had express orders to accept no hospitality in a place which was under the ban of Almighty God. He set out at once on his homeward journey to Jerusalem by the great northern road which runs from

Jerusalem by Gibeah and Ramah to Bethel, and so far all was well. The cause of religion had been vindicated with conspicuous effect by a man, as it seemed, of dauntless courage, and scrupulous fidelity to the Divine commands.

And now came his trial. An old prophet who lived at Bethel was informed by his sons of the scene which we have just been reviewing, of the courage of the man of God, of the striking and public humiliation of King Jeroboam. The old prophet had his ass saddled, rode after the man of God, and found him sitting under the tree, which, as the original implies, was long after marked as being that which was associated with this event. The younger man of God, no doubt, was weary with the effort and excitement of the day, and the old prophet begged him to return to Bethel and to eat with him. The man of God replied that he had exact instructions that he was not to do this, and, further, that he was not to go over any of the ground by which he had already travelled. The old prophet was equal to the occasion. He would meet one claim to direction from heaven by another claim, no matter what the latter was exactly worth. "He said unto him, I am a prophet also as thou art: and an angel spake unto me by the word of the Lord saying, Bring him back with thee into thine house, that he may eat bread and drink water. But," adds the sacred historian—"but he lied unto him."

Now, it is natural to ask, what was the old prophet's motive in taking so much trouble to induce the younger man to do what was wrong? Was the old prophet a false prophet of the type which a few years later abounded in Israel during the ascendency of the Baal-worship? Were his sympathies really on the side of Jeroboam and the new religion of the Egyptian calf, and did he think anything fair if he could only ruin the courageous young man who, on an occasion of such capital importance, had covered both the upstart religion and the upstart king, with such great and public discredit? This is what has been thought by some eminent authorities, but it cannot easily be reconciled with the sequel of the history: for how should

a false prophet be entrusted with the message announcing to the prophet of Judah the punishment of his transgression? How would a prophet who was opposed to the whole mission and work of the prophet of Judah have insisted on giving him honourable burial in his own grave? Once more, if the old prophet were at heart on the side of Jeroboam and the calf worship, how are we to explain his confirming the prediction of the prophet of Judah, about the coming destruction of the altar at Bethel? It is impossible to suppose that the old prophet was other than a true prophet of God, who had settled at Bethel, and the motive for his conduct must be looked for among those which might have weighed with a person so circumstanced.

And here we must observe that this old prophet, although a true prophet, was evidently a person with no keenness of conscience, with no high sense of duty. There he was, settled at Bethel, witnessing the triumphant establishment of the new idolatry and of the false, uncommissioned, intrusive priesthood. It does not appear that he had the heart to say a word against the profane proceedings of Jeroboam, while yet he had no hesitation about claiming heavenly authority for a message which he knew was solely dictated by his own wishes. He was evidently an easy-going old prophet, not embarrassed by scruples when he had an object in view, and the appearance on the scene of a younger man, conspicuous for the courage and energy in which he himself was personally deficient, would naturally have affected him in a double manner. Each of us, my brethren, has his better and his worse side, and belonging to each side or phase of our characters is a separate set of motives, which sometimes are in conflict, but sometimes combine strangely enough to produce a single course of action. The old prophet may very well have felt, in the one mood that he would be morally better if he could come into contact with a young man so evidently his superior in all that made the prophetic office an instrument of good. On the other hand, when in another mood, he may not have been sorry to

test the character of one whose excellence was a rebuke—he could not but feel it—a rebuke to himself. He may not have been distressed at the chance of discovering that this young man, who seemed to be so favoured by God and so honoured by man, was really, after all, not so very unlike other people—accessible to temptation, capable of inconsistency, liable to failure, to sin. The motives—admiration on the one hand, and a subtle, almost unsuspected, form of envy on the other—would have worked concurrently in the same direction and have led the old prophet to seek his younger brother on the Jerusalem road, and to tempt him to return with him to Bethel.

See here a tragical instance of the misuse of authority. The prophet of Bethel had the sort of authority which accompanies age and standing. It is an authority which comes in a measure to all who live long enough : it is an authority which belongs especially to fathers of families, and to high officers in Church or State, to kings, to statesmen, to bishops, to great writers, to conspicuous philanthropists, to public eminence in whatever capacity. It is a shadow of a greater and unseen authority which thus rests upon His earthly representatives, and invests this or that creature of a day with something of the dignity of the Eternal. What can be more piteous than when, with deliberation or thoughtlessly, it is employed against Him Whose authority alone makes it to be what it is? What more lamentable than when the old make truth and goodness more difficult of attainment to those who look up to them, or when, like this prophet of Bethel, they deliberately allure youth into the paths of sin, by appealing to its simple confidence in the wisdom of riper years, or to its reverence for a claim to teach, which would speedily disappear if the world at large were to join them in undermining loyalty to God's commands? Ah! there are prophets of Bethel in all ages. We have all need to remind ourselves that advancing years do not always mean progressive goodness, that they sometimes mean only progress in the fatal accomplishment of cynicism—that outward symbol of a seared conscience, and of

a hardened heart. We have all much reason to be careful lest, with advancing years, we look with unfriendly eye upon higher forms of virtue or of enterprise than we ourselves have ever attempted, but which God has put it into the heart of younger men to attempt. We know the language of the modern prophet of Bethel, pouring out cold water very steadily upon efforts after piety and goodness of which he ought to be the natural guide and protector: "Young man, when you have lived a few years more in the world, you will see the wisdom of what I tell you, and will give up that nonsense."

This disposition to discourage high and generous ideals of duty which have not presented themselves to an older generation, or still worse, have been neglected by it, is not unknown in the history of the Christian Church. A great movement may have taken place, in which God the Holy Ghost has placed before a generation of younger men a higher conception of what God's truth and God's service really mean than had occurred to their predecessors. It is always possible, or more than possible, that in a movement like this men will make mistakes, and that such a movement is all the better for the restraining, steadying, guiding influence of authority. But when authority, instead of guiding, discourages, instead of making the best use of the sacred fire—of which, after all, there is not too much in the world—sets to work deliberately to extinguish it, the consequences are disastrous. Either the higher enthusiasm is checked, and authority succeeds in the equivocal task of re-establishing the reign of laxity and indifference, or enthusiasm revolts in bitterness, it may be in un-Christian bitterness, against an authority which so misuses its privilege, and either casts all authority to the winds, or seeks new representatives of the principle of authority elsewhere. Be sure, in any case, that it is easier to tempt the young prophet back to Bethel, and to make him eat bread and drink water, than to guard against the lion that awaits him on his homeward way, and the unavailing regrets that in all but the very basest natures will follow his ruin.

The prophet of Judah, who had braved death and had rejected royal courtesies at the altar of Bethel, fell when tempted by the old prophet. He returned to Bethel and ate bread and drank water in the old prophet's house; and then the man who had led him into temptation, under the influence of a sudden inspiration pronounced his sentence: "It came to pass as they sat at the table that the word of the Lord came unto the prophet that brought him back: And he cried unto the man of God that came from Judah, saying, Thus saith the Lord, Forasmuch as thou hast disobeyed the mouth of the Lord and hast not kept the commandment which the Lord thy God commanded thee, but camest back and hast eaten bread and drank water in the place of which the Lord did say unto thee, Eat no bread and drink no water, thy carcase shall not come unto the sepulchre of thy fathers!" And when the younger man had again set out, and had met his fate and all was over, and the report had reached the ears of the tempter, there was the same assumption—no doubt it was a sincere assumption—of an almost judicial solemnity at this striking spectacle of the foretold and due punishment of sin. "And when the prophet that brought him back from the way heard thereof, he said, It is the man of God who was disobedient unto the voice of the Lord: Therefore the Lord hath delivered him unto the lion, which hath torn him, and slain him, according to the word of the Lord, which He spake unto him." This is the world's way. It first allures into disobedience, and sin, and then, when we have gone far on the road to ruin, it assumes the airs of outraged respectability; it reproaches us for having obeyed its own guidance only too faithfully; it wipes its mouth, and talks, like a very prophet, of truth and virtue, and it pronounces our social if not our moral doom.

It may be thought that the younger prophet sincerely believed his own instructions to be cancelled by the alleged message of the angel to his older brother at Bethel. A moment's thought would, should have told him that this could not be. He knew that God had spoken to himself; he knew

that God does not contradict himself. He might have been embarrassed for the moment by the confident story of the old prophet about the angel, if he did not suspect, as he might well have suspected, that all was not right, and that there was dishonesty somewhere. When any of us know certainly one piece of the Divine will, we simply have to act upon it, let others say what they may. No earthly authority can cancel, or suspend, or dispense with a duty which is perfectly clear to our own conscience. If a father bids his son tell a lie, the son's duty, notwithstanding the fifth commandment, is to disobey him. Why? Because, in giving such an order, the father cancels his own authority: he destroys that moral basis upon which alone it rests. If a bishop were to tell one of his clergy to preach against the Eternal Godhead of our Lord and Saviour, disobedience to such a bishop, notwithstanding his true apostolic commission, would be a sacred duty. Why? Because, in giving the order, the bishop would be striking a blow at the whole body of beliefs, the truth of which alone makes his office something better than an imposture. No; authority can never trifle with the basis on which it rests without ceasing to be authority, and the prophet of Judah might have known that neither the age of his tempter, nor the claim to a special revelation, could possibly warrant disobedience on his part to the clearly expressed command of God.

It has been maintained that the punishment awarded to the prophet of Judah was a disproportionately severe punishment. He forfeited his life, men say, not for committing murder, not for committing adultery, but only for eating bread in a particular place. After all, the command to abstain from eating and drinking at Bethel was not a moral precept, it was only a positive precept. It did not embody a moral truth apart from which God would cease to be what He is; it only enforced a command, without which, had it never been given, the moral law and the Divine character would still have been entirely unaffected by the omission. This is what is said, and certainly,

brethren, the precept violated by the prophet of Judah was only a positive, and was not a moral precept. But there are times when positive precepts assume high moral importance, and there are persons upon whom the observance of positive precepts exerts, or may exert, the very highest obligation—persons in whose case a precept positive assumes a distinctly moral character. Thus the observance of the Sabbath, as it was enforced upon the Jews, was a positive precept. It did not rest on the same intrinsic ground as the first commandment, or as the laws against committing murder or adultery: in other words we can conceive of God as having ordered one day in three or one day in nine specially to be observed in His honour, while yet being morally what He is in Himself, and we cannot conceive Him as being morally Himself, and yet condoning murder, or adultery, or lying. But the precept of the Sabbath has about it a moral character, on account of its intimate relation with a moral duty of consecrating a certain definite portion of life especially to God; and hence it has a place even in the moral law. And, in the same way, although no moral issue was universally involved in the matter of eating or not eating at Bethel, such an issue was involved in the particular case of the prophet of Judah. True, the precept was positive; but a prophet entrusted with a great mission on which the religious future of his country largely depended, was bound to consider his instructions as morally obligatory. It was his mission which gave those instructions their importance, and to disobey them was not merely to do this or that, it was to repudiate the whole principle of obedience, which was the essential spirit, the vital force, of the prophetic office. What was a man of God but a man who differed from other men in making his own those words of the Psalmist, "I have set God always before me," and how could this be done unless God's will was obeyed, so far as it was known, in great matters and small alike? It is in itself no great crime for a tired man out in a field at night to go to sleep: but, when the Queen's troops are before the enemy, a sentry who deliberately composed himself for a nap would

deserve to be shot. After all, the prophet Judah was not one of the peasants or townsfolk of Bethel; he could not have been as they had he wished it. Great opportunities, great endowments, great trusts, carry with them corresponding awful obligations. "To whom much is given, of them much shall be required." Disobedience which might have been venial in an ordinary Israelite, was a capital crime in a man so highly favoured as was this prophet, and the Eternal Justice—always just—punished it accordingly.

In view of this history, we do well to remind ourselves of the truth that no man, however good and strong, is inaccessible to temptation. If anybody could have seemed certain to have resisted an invitation to play false to his sacred commission, it would have been this prophet of Judah. He was highly gifted; he was absolutely fearless; he was, it seems, disinterested; he had struck terror into the heart of a powerful monarch at the proudest moment of his sinful career; he had proved as insensible to his cajoleries as he had been to his threats of vengeance. He falls in with a member of his own profession, his inferior in everything except in age, and he falls—he falls when resistance could in no circumstances have cost him a moment's anxiety. He sinned, it seemed, almost out of good nature, because it was easier to acquiesce than to say No to a garrulous and importunate old man. Depend upon it, the temptations which play the worst havoc with our souls are not those which present themselves on great occasions and in a formidable shape. The story of the Talmud that Nimrod—the mighty hunter of lions—was killed by a spider that crawled up into his brain during sleep, has a moral meaning. Great temptations arouse resistance; they provoke new efforts; they put us on our mettle. We think of the judgments of our fellow men, of consistency with our best selves, as well as of the will of God. The temptations which ruin thousands are those which come to us in a commonplace way, from some friendly or unexpected source, and when there is nothing striking, nothing dramatic, in resisting them. It is easier for most men

to defy the threats of Jeroboam than to tell the old prophet of Bethel to go about his business. It has been said with much truth, that if the evil one would only take a bodily shape, the world would be much better than it is. He gets his way in the most ordinary affairs of daily life, because no one bestows a thought upon him as being, all the while, as he is, busily at work behind the scenes. May our Lord and Saviour, Who conquered him of old, enable us, weak as we are, to detect and to resist his advances, in the firm persuasion than God's commandments stand sure, whether we keep them or not; that the transgression, if unrepented of, means certain punishment; that God is faithful, and will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it. "O turn away mine eyes, lest they behold vanity, and quicken Thou me in Thy way."

ADORATION.*

"O come, let us worship and bow down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker."—PSALM xcv. 6.

THESE words will be very familiar to all church-goers, because they occur in the psalm which always forms part of the morning's service. This psalm is still used in the Friday evening service of the Jewish synagogue as an invitation to the duties of the Sabbath; and the Western Church of Christ from very early times has sung it, as the Church of England sings it to this day, as an introduction to daily worship. No other psalm is so frequently used in the English Prayer-book, and the reason for the prominence thus assigned to it is probably twofold. First, although in its original form it may have been written by David, it bears traces of having been expanded and adapted by some other inspired writer for use as an introit or introduction at some one of the temple services;

* Preached in St. Paul's Cathedral, on Sunday afternoon, August 15th, 1886.

and, secondly, the New Testament marks out this psalm for special distinction, since in the Epistle to the Hebrews more of its verses are quoted and commented on than is the case with any other psalm. Such a psalm necessarily suggests a great many subjects of interest; but the point to which the text directs our attention is the import and value of its invitation to worship: "O come, let us worship and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker."

Now if you look at the psalm in your prayer-books, you will see that it contains two strophes or stanzas: the first consisting of five verses and the second of six. Each of these stanzas opens with an invitation. The first is an invitation to praise offered loudly with the voice. Literally rendered it runs thus: "O come, let us shout joyfully to the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the Rock of our salvation; let us go forth to meet Him with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to Him with hymns." And the second stanza begins with an invitation to something altogether different,—to worship, or as we had better render it, to adoration. This invitation is conveyed by words which, rendered literally, would run thus: "O come, let us prostrate ourselves, let us bow down, let us kneel before the Lord our Maker." The word which is rendered "worship" means prostration, literally nothing less than prostration. The two words which follow mean something less emphatic—the first, the bending of the body while the worshipper still stands, the second, kneeling. Nothing changes in the East so far as habit is concerned, and you cannot to-day enter a mosque without seeing each of these three words literally acted on. Sometimes the worshipper bends his head and shoulders, then he kneels, then he prostrates himself entirely, touching the ground with his forehead. This, so far as the outward posture goes, is undoubtedly what the Psalmist meant to invite the congregation of Israel to do, as being the outward expression of adoration. But adoration is an inward act of the soul which corresponds with those postures of the body which have just been described. It is the soul re-

cognising its nothingness before the magnificence of God, its sin before His purity, its ignorance before His omniscience, its feebleness before His power. It is the creature lying in the dust and understanding, as by a flash of light from heaven, what it is to have been created, what it is to have a Creator and to be alive in His presence. It is sinful man emptying himself of self-assertion before the Being Who made him, knowing himself, or almost knowing himself as He is known, crying: "Out of the deep have I called unto Thee, O Lord,—out of the deep of my sinfulness to Thy perfect holiness, out of the deep of my folly to Thy infinite wisdom, out of the deep of my weakness to Thy boundless power,—out of the deep have I called to Thee, the All-mighty, the All-wise, the All-good: Lord, hear my voice."

Every false religion has some sustaining truth in it, and the truth which is especially recognised by Mohammedanism is that which is implied in adoration. The name by which this religion is known throughout the East is a most vivid and beautiful word, which touches the universal conscience of mankind. "Islam" means subjection—the subjection of the creature to the Creator, the subjection of man to God. It is not now our business to inquire how far in practice Mohammedanism realises the moral expectations which are raised by its distinctive name. The name itself is based on a truth which certainly does not concern us Christians less than other people. The name "Islam" shines with a moral light to which we, the servants of Christ, cannot close our eyes. Who can doubt that side by side with the ruthless scimitar, which proved so terribly effective a missionary in the hands of the early followers of the Arabian prophet, this pregnant and inspiring word "Islam" did its work in many a noble soul, attracting it powerfully to a religion of which the central and fundamental feature seemed to be nothing else or less than the insistance on the true attitude of man to Almighty God? Nor, so far as the attitude of worship goes, does the practice of religious Moslems belie their profession. As has been said, Moham-

medanism contains features to which Christianity is vitally opposed. We do not forget that the moral system of the Koran on the better side is only a reflex of the natural nobility of the Arab character; on its worst side, it is a deliberate compromise with, if it be not rather a surrender to, the strongest and most destructive passions of our fallen nature. We do not forget that although in Mohammedanism our Lord Jesus Christ is accounted a prophet, ranking below Mohammed, but with Adam and Abraham and Moses, yet that His divinity, His co-equality with the Father, is insolently rejected in those very verses of the Koran which are inscribed in large letters round the Mosque of the Dome of the Rock at Jerusalem, as if to bid defiance to the central truth of the Christian creed on the very spot which, next to the sites of the nativity, the crucifixion, and the resurrection, is holiest in Christian eyes. We do not forget this: and yet let us do justice to the manner in which the religious Moslem rejoices to acknowledge the claims of God, so far as he understands them. Five times a day from the minaret does the Muezzin proclaim the call to prayer. Not seldom during the still hours of the night is this call heard sounding above the towers of an Eastern city, and inviting the faithful who are still awake to rise and pray. And in early morning, and as the sun sets, and in the busiest hours of the day, all else gives way to the duty, the supreme duty, of publicly acknowledging the sovereignty of God; and in the fields, or in the bazaar, or in the barrack-room, or on the deck of the crowded steamboat, not less than in the mosque or in the home, the devout Moslem will unwrap his carpet, consecrating thereby, as he conceives, one spot on earth to the most solemn of its duties, and utterly regardless of the wonder or of the sneers of bystanders, will he prostrate himself, with the evident sincerity of utter self-abasement, before the inaccessible majesty of the one Omnipotent and Eternal Being. No Christian can watch this spectacle unmoved, or without a certain feeling of compunction or self-reproach. If that narrow and arid conception of God which is all that really meets the

student in the pages of the Koran can draw forth from the heart of these poor Moslems this utter, this passionate devotion, what ought not to be the case with us who know God in His blessed Son, who survey in the light of His one certain and outward revelation of Himself the whole range of His glorious attributes; who, if we would only understand our privileges, are flooded with light, since we are at His feet in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge? What should not our practice be? What is it? May it not be that, in the eyes of that unerring Justice which eighteen centuries ago summoned the men of Nineveh and the Queen of the South to rise in judgment against the generation which listened to Him, but listened to Him without profit, many of us Christians, too, may stand condemned by our failure to render the tribute of adoration to Him Who has redeemed and sanctified, as well as created us, by the practice of those very Mohammedans whom our missionaries would fain convert to Christ?

In the strictness of the word, adoration is an expression by an outward, but much more by an inward act, of man's sincere conviction that his first duty to Almighty God is submission. And thus it is distinct from many other acts of the soul which are sometimes apt to be mistaken for it. Contrast it, for example, with admiration. Many people in our day seem to think that a sincere and very warm admiration of God will do as well, or almost as well, as adoring Him. They see beautiful scenery, or they trace, or think they trace, a particular motive at work in the course of human events; or they read a book of astronomy, and for the moment they are interested in the distances and the magnitude of the fixed stars; or they are students of the laws of human thought, and they are too sensible to suppose that those laws can be accounted for by supposing them to have been somehow evolved from some original, self-existent paste. Well, brethren, these persons are on the right road to go much further than admiration: they are, if they only knew it, on the road to adoration, but they do

somehow content themselves with admiring God. They say many fine and true things about the Author of the material and intellectual universe which so greatly interests them, but then they say just as much about it as about its Author. If all that is to be given to God is the enthusiasm which we bestow on a beautiful flower, or on a grand mountain, or on a splendid poem, it is clear that, however warmly we may admire, we are a long way from adoration. As admirers, mark this, we are taking it for granted that we are so far on a level with the object admired as to be able to do Him justice; as admirers we presuppose and exercise, although favourably, our rights as critics. In adoration, we abandon utterly all such pretensions as profane, as grotesque; we have no thought but that of God's solitary and awful greatness, and of our own utter insignificance before Him.

Adoration, then, is not, in any serious sense, devotion. But compare adoration with the other acts of the soul which do undoubtedly belong to devotion. When we assemble and meet together in church, it is, as we are daily reminded, to "render thanks for the great benefits that we have received at God's hands, to set forth His most worthy praise, to hear His most holy word, and to ask those things which are requisite and necessary as well for the body as the soul." Of these four objects of assembling together in church, that of hearing God's Word, whether read or preached, is not now in question. But what is the relation of the other three, thanksgiving, praise, and prayer for blessings, to adoration? They all three differ from adoration in this, that in each of them the soul is less prostrate, more able to bear the thought of self, than in pure and simple adoration? Certainly, in praise we seem to forget self more easily than in thanksgiving or prayer, since thanksgiving carries the mind back to something which we have received, and by which presumably we have profited, and prayer, in the narrower sense of the word, asks for new blessings, whether for the body or soul. Pure adoration has no heart for self; it lies there silent at the foot of the throne,

conscious only of two things, the insignificance of self and the greatness of God. And yet adoration must be the basis, so to put it, of true thanksgiving and praise and prayer; it is the fitting acknowledgment of our real relations with God, which should precede them. It sometimes does, indeed, imply so paralysing a sense of this our nothingness before God that left to itself it would make praise, thanksgiving, and prayer impossible. But here, as we lie in the dust, the one Mediator between God and man bids us take heart as He utters that most consoling sentence: "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." He bids us, as it were, take His hand, and thus, with Him and by Him, not merely adore God, but praise Him, thank Him, pray to Him. Prayer, we know, is effectual when it is offered in His prevailing name. "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you." Praise is accepted when it is associated with Him by Whom and with Whom, in the unity of the Holy Ghost, all glory and honour is rendered unto God the Father Almighty. Thanksgiving is welcomed when it is offered in union with Him Who is the one Thankoffering of Christendom, no less than its one propitiatory Sacrifice, especially when it is offered in that most solemn of all services that are possible on earth, in which we venture most daringly into the very presence-chamber of the Heavens, because leaning on a strength and covered with a righteousness which most assuredly is not our own. But until our Lord and Saviour thus takes us by the hand, adoration, the most distant and the most lowly, of the Infinite and Almighty God is all that is, seriously speaking, open to such as us. And when He has thus taken us by the hand, and has taught us to thank and praise and pray to God in virtue of the strength which flows from union with Himself, adoration still remains, it remains as the expression of our original and permanent relation as creatures at the footstool of the Creator. "O come, let us prostrate ourselves, let us bend low, let us fall before the Lord our Maker," is addressed to all human souls for all time.

In our common language, worship, no doubt, is not thus accurately distinguished from praise and thanksgiving and prayer. It is understood to include them : it is understood to mean not adoration proper, but the whole series of acts which make up the devotional duty of the soul to Almighty God. The psalmist's words do not mean as much as this, but we are not doing him a wrong if we consider them in a light of this popular paraphrase, which may, indeed, be largely justified by a reference to the opening verses of the psalm. Now in our day there is a disposition abroad, even, among those who do not professedly reject revealed religion, to speak disparagingly of worship, even when taken in this larger sense. Worship is treated as the indulgence of a sentiment rather than as the discharge of a sacred and imperative duty, and it is implied that too much is made of it in the system and practice of the Christian Church. The Church, according to one of these theorists, ought to be a great society for the social and political improvement of mankind, whereas it is little better than what he contemptuously calls an organisation for worship. Worship, he contends—if not in terms, yet by implication—ought to be only the by-play of a really vigorous and living Church, whereas worship seems to be the main concern of the actual Christian Church, as it has been of the Church of bygone days. Now no Christian would wish to undervalue the social duties of the Christian Church, its duties, I mean, in the way of promoting improvement in the outward and material life of the people. But they are not its most important duties, as they would be undoubtedly if men had no souls, and if there were no certainty about the eternal future, and if, as is very unlikely under these circumstances, anything that could be called a Church were in existence. They are not its most important duties, but, as a matter of fact, the idea that we have such duties at all is in the main a creation of the Christian Church. In particular, philanthropy, as we witness it to-day in all the countries of Europe, is a product of the Church's sense of social duty ; it is the modern successor of those miracles of healing

which won the hearts of the Galilean peasantry eighteen hundred years ago. But just as our Lord's works of mercy on the bodies of men were not either the main object or the most distinguishing feature of His ministry, so the social benefits conferred by the Church of Christ are not the main objects or ornaments of her mission to mankind. Her first business is to put the souls of men in the way of being saved by bringing them to their Lord and Saviour, and, so far as may be, to promote their sanctification through the ministries of His Spirit; and then, in subordination to this end, and as an auxiliary to it, to do what she may for their temporal well-being. But if men's souls are to be saved, worship, both public and private, is indispensable. It is much more necessary to the Church's life than any sort or kind of social improvement that can be named, and to disparage worship is to strike a blow at the very heart of the Church; it is, so far as we can, to cut up and kill the roots of the tree of Christian activity; it is the conduct of a man who should disparage and forbid us air and exercise on the ground, forsooth, that the true business of life was some very exacting indoor occupation.

Let us, then, briefly remind ourselves of some leading benefits of worship, which explain the importance which is assigned to it by the Church of Christ. First of all, it places us, both as individuals and as a body of men, in our true place before God our Creator. Unless, or until, we believe that one Being exists to Whom we stand in a relation utterly different from that in which we stand to any other—namely, that of owing our very existence to Him—worship is impossible. "Be ye sure that the Lord He is God: it is He that hath made us and not we ourselves,"—this is the certainty which lies at the basis of worship. We cannot worship some shadow of the world of thought; we cannot bow down before a theory or hypothesis as to the origin of things. Unless we "believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible," worship cannot be. It only begins when faith acknowledges

the Almighty Creator: it dies away as faith in Him decays; it dies away as He gives place in thought to some purely human imagination respecting how the universe came to be what it actually is.

But even where there is no difficulty in believing in God the Creator, and no disposition to question His existence or His power, we sometimes observe that this great belief has no practical effect whatever upon life and thought. We constantly see men—it may be that we ourselves, some of us, are among the number—see men who never seriously put it to themselves what it is to have a Creator. Active, enterprising men, full of energy, conscious of power, still in tolerably good health, accustomed to have their own way more or less among their fellows, do not readily admit to themselves the bearing of the hard fact that one Being exists by Whose will it is that they themselves exist at all, and that their existence is continued to them from moment to moment. If you say to one of them: "Do you believe in a Creator?" he would say, "Of course I do;" but practically the world of sense is so engrossing, so importunate, that it crushes this faith back into a remote corner of the soul. Many such men practically live as though it were not true that it is God Who has made us and not we ourselves.

Now the corrective to this—which is a practical failure, after all, rather than an intellectual mistake—the corrective to this is worship. Worship places us face to face with the greatness of the Creator. It puts us, as we comtemplate Him, out of heart with ourselves, with our own rights, with our own pretensions. We have, it may be, to confess to Him, "Other gods besides Thee have had dominion over us," but the very first effort of worship implies that God is resuming, has resumed, His true place in our thoughts, that He is no longer jostled out of our mental life by a hundred puny worthless rivals belonging to the world of sense. We cannot be practically forgetting what it is to have a Creator when we sincerely obey the invitation to "come and worship and fall down and kneel before Him."

Worship, too, obliges us to think what we are ourselves. It is one thing to hold the immortality of man as an abstract tenet, it is another to be looking forward with a steady, practical aim to a life to come. When we worship we pass inside the veil of sense, we cross the threshold of the unseen world, we enter upon an exercise which is itself a preparation for the life which lies before us after this is over. We bow down before the majesty of God, but we also understand something of the meaning of our own existence. Who are we, that we should thus venture into His presence-chamber, if we are indeed only the creatures of a day, only beings of flesh and blood, whose life is bounded by an earthly horizon? Surely, this action of worship, in which the brutes do not participate, implies the truth which lies so deep in the minds of men—the truth of an immortal destiny. Worship, depend upon it, is the great preparation for another life: a waste of time, no doubt, if the soul dies with the perishing body, if decay be succeeded by no resurrection, but a use of time than which none can be more sensible, more legitimate, if there be a most certain hereafter, and if while "the things that are seen are temporal, the things that are not seen are eternal."

And thus, lastly, worship is a stimulus to action, when, and, of course, only when, it is sincere. If it be true that "to work is to pray," it is also true that to pray is to work. Prayer is, in fact, work, since it makes a large demand upon the energies of the soul, and it creates and trains in us capacity for other kinds of work than itself. It not only illuminates the understanding and enkindles the affection; it braces, it invigorates the will. In this it has a precisely opposite effect to that which may be sometimes traced to an exaggerated fondness for books of imagination. Certain kinds of novels, for instance, do enfeeble the will, by rousing us to take a keen interest in that which we know all the while has no existence whatever in fact, and thus we spend our little stock of moral force on recognised unreality, or, as the apostle would put it, to "beat the air." In worship we are in contact with the most real of

all beings—with Him on Whose will all else that is strictly depends, and in comparison with Whom the most solid matter in His universe is but an unsubstantial shadow. This contact with the highest reality cannot but brace us, and accordingly we find in all ages that the noblest resolves to act or to suffer have again and again been formed, as though in obedience to what seems a sudden overpowering flash of light, during worship. So it was with Isaiah when, in the year that King Uzziah died, he saw the vision in the temple: "I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I: send me." So it has been with more than one enterprise in our own day which it might be improper, or premature, to name—the original resolution to make the venture has dated from a half-hour of sincere worship, in which the energies of a single character have been lifted altogether above their average level, so that it became natural and easy to remove the mountain obstacles that had barred the way to action.

And this will explain the connection of this exhortation to worship in this ninety-fifth psalm with the sudden warning which follows. It may have struck us as unintelligibly abrupt when the psalmist, after exclaiming: "O come, let us worship and fall down, and kneel before the Lord our Maker; for He is the Lord our God, and we are the people of His pasture and the sheep of His hand," suddenly proceeds: "To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts." We fail, at first, to see the connection between that earnest exhortation to worship and this sudden, this startling warning against disobedience. But it lies precisely in the fact that we are considering, the fact that worship is apt to be a time and season of some special appeal from on high to the sense of duty, an appeal which, as free agents, we may disregard, or we may obey, at choice. "To-day, if ye will hear His voice, harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness." The apostle, we remember, reminds Christians that they too may be guilty of the sins of unbelief and disobe-

dience such as those of Israel when so immediately in God's presence at Massah and Meribah ; that before them, too, there is the Promised Land, into which they may, after all, never enter. But this illustrates the moral invigoration which does, if we are not hardening our hearts, accompany sincere worship, just as restored health of body naturally results from a visit to the seaside or to a mountain district, unless bad habits or wilful neglect make recovery impossible.

Such considerations—apart from what is due to God as God, apart from the answers that are vouchsafed to prayer—may help to remove the mistaken idea that the importance assigned to worship in the public system of the Church of Christ is a sort of corruption of the true purpose of Christianity. In truth, it would be better for us all if we could more frequently and more earnestly comply with the Psalmist's invitation. Life is given us that we may learn our true relations with its Author, and may prepare to live with Him for ever. In another world we shall probably look back upon the way in which we have spent much of our time here with deep, though unavailing, regret; but we may be sure that no such regret will ever be felt on account of any time that has been devoted to the worship of our Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. Amen.

JERUSALEM.*

"Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem."—PSALM cxxii. 2.

THE psalm from which this verse is taken was probably written by a pilgrim to Jerusalem at some time previous to the Babylonish captivity. On the one hand, it is clear that "the house of the Lord," the ancient Temple, was still standing; on the other, the reference to the house of David and the anxious prayer for the peace of Jerusalem, its walls, its palaces, seem to point to a later time than that of David.

* Preached in St. Paul's Cathedral, on Sunday afternoon, August 22nd, 1886.

The pilgrim who composed the psalm would have belonged to one of the ten separated tribes, but he had remained, after the general defection, true to the Divinely ordered worship at Jerusalem, and this psalm may well have been composed on the occasion of his first visit. We observe in it his delight at the mere prospect of the journey, his ecstasy at finding himself, or at the very thought of finding himself, within the sacred gates, his wonder at the aspect of the city lying before him as he stood, probably, on the Mount of Olives, his sense of its past glories and of its present titles to honour—the thrones of David and of Solomon, the sacred Temple. But there are presages of coming trouble in the air, and as the Psalmist thinks of his brethren in the faith who live within its walls, and of the House of God, which was its most prominent and its most precious feature, he offers a prayer for the peace of the holy city which has so large a place in his heart.

We must confine ourselves this afternoon to his expressions of delight at standing within the gates of Jerusalem. "Our feet stand," so runs the original, "within thy gates, O Jerusalem." Possibly he had not yet reached it, and, in accordance with Hebrew usage, he treats a future assumed to be certain as if it were present, so that "Our feet shall stand in thy gates," if not a literal translation, yet expresses the prosaic fact. But, however this may be, there is no question as to his enthusiasm, and he will himself partly enable us to explain it, while in considering the use of his language by other pilgrims during successive centuries, we must have recourse to considerations which belong to a later age and to a wider outlook than was his.

Now, one thing that would have struck a pilgrim to Jerusalem who should approach the city, as was natural, from its north-eastern side, would be its beauty. The modern world, no doubt, has analysed the idea of the picturesque, but the ancients also felt it. The pilgrim who saw the city of Solomon lying at his feet could not but exclaim with the

psalmist of Hezekiah's time after the discomfiture of Sennacherib: "The hill of Zion is a fair place, and the joy of the whole earth." Even an Israelite of the date of the captivity whose eye rested on the ruins produced by the Chaldean triumph could not but mourn with Jeremiah: "Is this the city that men call the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth?" The stately buildings erected by Solomon on the south side of the Temple area, Solomon's own house, the house of judgment, the house of the forest of Lebanon, the palaces of the kings of Zion, the palaces of the princes of Judah around it, the circuit of the walls, above all, the Temple—the Temple with its courts, with its burnished roofs, with its lofty gates, with its towers, surrounded as all this was on three sides by deep ravines and olive-clad hills, would have delighted the visitor to Jerusalem in the days of Jehoshaphat or Hezekiah. The feature in that view which did seem to give especial pleasure was the compactness of the holy city, doubtless as it was seen from the Mount of Olives, and thus the pilgrim of our psalm exclaims, "Jerusalem is built as a city that is at unity with itself—that is, compact together." This compactness was produced by the compression of the city between the deep valleys which on three of its sides surround it, especially those of Hinnom on the south, and of Kedron or Jehoshaphat on the east—deep ravines like those which run round Durham or round Luxembourg, which arrested the extension of the city on these sides, while the same effect was produced by the fortifications which were necessary to guard against the approach of an enemy on the north and north-west. Possibly this pilgrim had seen Damascus, straggling out amid the beautiful oasis which surrounds it in the plain of the Abana, or he had seen Memphis, a long string of buildings, thickly populated, extending for some twelve or fourteen miles along the west bank of the Nile. Compared with these, Jerusalem had the compact beauty of a highland fortress, its buildings as seen from below standing out against the clear Syrian sky, and conveying an impression of grace and strength

that would long linger in the memory. No doubt in the eyes of a religious pilgrim in those old Jewish times, as afterwards, the physical beauty of Jerusalem must have suggested and blended with a beauty of a higher order. Men look with new eyes on walls, and towers, and streets, and edifices on which a Heavenly presence is believed to rest, or with which they have religious associations. To some of us here, perhaps, a humble village church with no pretensions to beauty, or a place of worship in some dusty by-street of this metropolis is gilded with a radiance that we cannot discern in the grandest cathedral, because it is associated with moments of our own spiritual history that we can never forget. The beauty of the world of spirit imparts to the world of sense a subtle lustre which of itself it could never possess. "Walk about Zion, and go round about her, and tell the towers thereof; mark well her bulwarks, set up her houses, that ye may tell them that come after." And why? "For this God is our God for ever and ever: He shall be our guide unto death."

And, secondly, Jerusalem was the centre of the religious and national life of Israel. This only became fully recognised during the reign of Solomon, and it was the great object of Jeroboam to efface, if he could, this supremacy of Jerusalem by the new civil capital at Shechem, and by the new centres of worship at Dan and Bethel. But when Jeroboam had done his best, or his worst, religious men still went up to Jerusalem at the great festivals, from Ephraim and Manasseh, from Naphtali and Zebulun, no less than from Judah and Jerusalem. "Thither," cries the pilgrim, "thither the tribes go up, even the tribes of the Lord, to testify unto Israel, and give thanks unto the name of the Lord." For Israel, as the people of the revelation, was at once a civil society and a Church—the two were not then essentially distinct, as has been and is the case in Christendom. And Jerusalem was the centre of Israel's civil life: "For there," sings the pilgrim, "are the thrones of judgment set, even the thrones of the house of David"—the ancient and venerable tribunals from which the successors

of David and Solomon had dispensed justice during successive generations. Jerusalem was now, indeed, the capital of a small state, but there lingered around its walls and palaces memories of the time when its sovereigns had ruled from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates. And Jerusalem was much more than the civil heart of Israel. It was its religious centre: its greatest distinction was that the Temple lay within its walls. "He chose the tribe of Judah, even the hill of Zion which He loved, and there He built His temple on high, and laid the foundations of it like the ground which He hath made continually." No other title to distinction in those ancient days could compete with this—"the place which God did choose to put His name there." The deepest prayer in the true Israelite's heart, wherever he might live, ran thus: "One thing have I desired of the Lord, which I will require, even that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the fair beauty of the Lord, and to visit His temple." Its stately beauty, its ordered course of services, its awful sanctions, its precious associations, gathering volume year by year with the deepest sympathies of successive generations, made the Temple for pious Israelites unlike any other place on earth. Jerusalem was what it was in a good Israelite's eyes less on its own account than because it contained the Temple. "Yea," cries the pilgrim, as he looks out on the fair city beneath him—"yea, because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek to do thee good." And so, although the city of Solomon and its Temple passed away, and a new city and a new temple rose upon the ruins of the old, pilgrims still came up with the old psalm upon their lips and in their hearts: "Our feet shall stand in thy gates, O Jerusalem."

And a third characteristic of Jerusalem, which appealed to religious pilgrims like this psalmist-pilgrim was, if I may so phrase what I mean, its unworldliness. This appears partly in its situation. Jerusalem was not on the sea, or on a navigable river. The little stream of the Kedron was dry for the

greater part of the year in ancient days as now, and nothing but rude mountains-paths connected the city with Egypt on one side or with Syria on the other. It was thus cut off from those activities of commerce and intercourse with distant countries which are essential to the material well-being and development of a great capital. Solomon in all his glory never dreamt of changing the site, though he was keenly alive to the advantages of a merchant-navy, and did his best to encourage one in the distant port of Ezion-geber on the Red Sea. And Isaiah rejoices in describing Zion, "the city of our solemnities," as "a quiet habitation, wherein should go no galley with oars, neither should gallant ship pass by." In his eyes its religious character, as well as its security, are insured by its seclusion from the great highways of the world of his day. Contrast Solomon and Isaiah with Herod. Herod, a clever man of the world, who viewed religious interests as one department of the game of politics, certainly completed the second Temple on a magnificent scale, and built for himself a handsome palace on the west side of the holy city. But if Jewish feeling demanded these concessions, Herod felt that the real capital of such a realm as he desired to rule had better be down on the shore of the Mediterranean, as was Cæsarea. Cæsarea was just what its name suggests, a sort of smaller Rome. Its baths, its theatres, its temples, its public places, were in keeping with the Roman idea of civil life : above all, its situation placed it in immediate contact with other great centres of civilisation and trade. It is when we consider what Cæsarea was, and what Jerusalem was not, we understand what I have called the "unworldliness" of the site of the city of David.

And this characteristic may be further illustrated by the smallness of Jerusalem. It was a very small capital for the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin ; it was astonishingly small to be the metropolis of such an empire as that of Solomon. And its smallness was not accidental. No large capital could have existed in such a situation. As we have already seen, Jerusalem was bounded on three sides by deep valleys or

ravines, while the fourth had to be strongly fortified. When Nebuchadnezzar took Jerusalem in the days of Jehoiakim, there were less than twenty thousand inhabitants in it altogether. When Titus took Jerusalem, the addition of the third wall had greatly increased the area of the city, but the six hundred thousand whom terror and zeal had gathered around or within its walls were largely the population, not of the city itself, but of the adjoining districts. In point of size Jerusalem could ill bear comparison with our larger London parishes, Marylebone or Islington. It would seem insignificant beside any European capital. It covers at this moment a larger area than was included within the walls in the days of Solomon, or in the days of our Lord, although not so large as at the date of the siege of Titus; but, as it is, you can walk round it without much fatigue before breakfast. What does this teach us but the old lesson that material size has nothing to do with the highest influences they bear on the life of man? No city in the world has so profoundly influenced the highest life of millions of the human race as has Jerusalem. London, New York, Paris—they are magnificent in their way; vast centres of material civilisation, with here and there some feeble witness for that, which after all transcends matter—they are magnificent in their way, but in all that touches the highest thoughts and the deepest motives to action known to us men they are insignificant indeed, by comparison with the little highland town in a remote province of the empire of Turkey. Certainly, they do not suggest to any inspired evangelist in his sublimest moments the vision of some heavenly city. They may have their attractions, but they do not draw to themselves all those highest sympathies which are intent upon the kingdom of spirit. We quiet Englishmen, surveying our own metropolis, are not tempted to indulge in the transcendental rhapsodies Victor Hugo has lavished upon Paris. We read his effusions in cold blood; perhaps, we smile at them as somewhat unsuited to an age of common sense; but if we are wise we do not smile at the ecstasies of

prophets and of psalmists before the holier but smaller city in the distant East. For the measurements of the realm of matter afford no clue whatever to the measurements of the realm of spirit, and elect souls will go on crying to the end of time with an ever-deepening meaning in the words: "Our feet shall stand in thy gates, O Jerusalem."

And once more. As the centuries went on, Jerusalem, thus dear to the heart of Israel as being what it was in itself, became yet dearer to it by misfortune. Of all that is most beautiful in life, sorrow is the last consecration. Sorrow is the poetry, no less than the discipline of humanity. Scarcely had the great sovereign who did so much for the magnificence of Jerusalem been laid in his grave, when the Egyptian king Shishak captured it from his foolish son Rehoboam and despoiled the palace and the Temple. A century passed, and the Temple was again plundered by an incursion of the southern Arabian and Philistine tribes. Sixty years later, after the defeat of Ahaziah, Jehoash, king of Israel, entered Jerusalem as a conqueror, and stripped the Temple and the palace of all the gold he could find. The city, too, must have suffered severely from the great earthquake in the time of Uzziah. It escaped, as we know, the destruction threatened by Sennacherib; but the new fortifications with which it was surrounded by Manasseh after his return from Babylon, did not avert its impending fate. Nebuchadnezzar entered the city, pillaged the Temple and the royal palace, and carried King Jehoiakim and ten thousand captives to Babylon. Not long after, the remaining Jews, under Zedekiah, revolted, and, after a siege of a year and five months, Jerusalem was again taken: whatever was valuable that remained was carried to Babylon, the Temple was burned, and the entire city was laid in ruins. We know something of the feelings of pious Jews at this frightful time, not only from the lamentations of Jeremiah, but also from one or more of the psalmists, who concealed probably in some cellar or other place of refuge, watched the brutal ravages of the conquerors—watched the

progress of destruction, and poured out in their inspired poetry all the anguish of their hearts. "O God, the heathen are come into Thine inheritance. Thy holy temple have they defiled and made Jerusalem a heap of stones: the dead bodies of Thy servants have they given to be meat unto the fowls of the air, and the flesh of Thy saints unto the beasts of the land. Thine adversaries roar in the midst of Thy congregations: they set up their banners for tokens. He that hewed timber aforetime out of the thick trees was known to bring it to an excellent work: but now they break down all the carved work thereof with axes and hammers. They have set fire upon Thy holy places: they have defiled the dwelling-place of Thy name, even to the ground." And so, when the work of ruin was complete, another Israelite cries out of his bondage—cries as if breaking a silence which had long been imposed upon him, whether by suffering or by reverence: "Thou shalt arise and have mercy upon Zion, for it is time Thou have mercy upon her, yea, the time is come. For why? Thy servants think upon her stones, and it pitieth them to see her in the dust." And this feeling of attachment to Jerusalem, ever deepening in proportion to her misfortunes, is, perhaps, most passionately expressed by the psalmist by the waters of Babylon: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning! If I do not remember thee, let my tongue cleave unto the roof of my mouth! yea, if I prefer not Jerusalem in my mirth." Undoubtedly the author of our psalm would already have seen in Jerusalem the pathos and the dignity which so often come with suffering: and those who used this psalm in later ages would have felt increasingly this element of the attraction of the holy city. After the exile, Jerusalem rose from its ruins, but slowly. It was really rebuilt through the energy of Nehemiah, the favourite cup-bearer of the Persian King Artaxerxes Longimanus. The next great event in its history was the plunder of the Temple by Antiochus Epiphanes on his return from Egypt, and the subsequent destruction of the city itself by his chief collector of taxes. Twice afterwards

Jerusalem was forced by hunger to capitulate to the Assyrian armies; and then came the first Roman conquest, the slaughter of twelve thousand Jews within the Temple precincts, the profanation of the sanctuary by Pompey, the pillage of the treasury by Crassus, and the second capture of the city by Herod with the aid of Rome resulting in another hideous massacre. And all through the ages the pilgrims came up and sang with an ever increasing enthusiasm, "Our feet shall stand in thy gates, O Jerusalem." The immense sorrows of the sacred city did but press its very stones more closely to their hearts. And at last a destruction came that seemed to be final, and in the late summer of the year A.D. 70, after a siege, the horrors of which are almost without a parallel in history, Jerusalem was laid once more in the dust by the legions of Titus—so utterly in the dust that for half a century its very site was deserted.

Certainly, if one thing is clear from Scripture and from experience, sorrows such as those of Jerusalem are the result of sin. Jeremiah in his day was never weary of pointing out the connection. "Thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, behold I will bring upon this city all the evil that I have pronounced against it, because they have hardened their necks that they might not hear My words, for who shall have pity on thee, O Jerusalem? or who shall bemoan thee? or who shall go aside to ask how thou doest? Thou hast forsaken Me, saith the Lord, thou art gone backward; therefore will I stretch out My hand against thee and destroy thee. I am weary with repenting. Go ye now to My place which was in Shiloh, where I set My name at the first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of My people Israel. And now, because ye have done all these works, saith the Lord, therefore will I do unto this house which is called by My name wherein ye trust, and unto the place which I gave to you and to your fathers as I have done to Shiloh." And this did but anticipate the words of one greater, incomparably greater, than Jeremiah in a later age: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee,

how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her children under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate." And yet this traditional sin continued from age to age, this perpetual rebellion against God and against light, this idolatry, this cruelty, this scornful, shallow, thankless spirit, which flaunted its vulgar insolence in the very face of the Eternal mercy, could not kill out the sense of blessing which attached to the sacred spot in the eyes of successive generations of pilgrims. Thinking only of "the sure mercies of David," thinking with the apostle of a later age that "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance," again and again—under Manasseh as under Hezekiah, under Jehoiakim as under Josiah—they uttered their song, "Our feet shall stand within thy gates, O Jerusalem."

The events which make Jerusalem what it is in Christian eyes do not belong to the Old Testament. That wonderful self-manifestation of the Eternal Being among men, which began at Jerusalem and Nazareth, reached its climax at Jerusalem. On the hills around this favoured city, along its streets, in the courts of its great sanctuary, there walked in visible form One Who had already lived from everlasting, and Who had folded around His sacred person a body and the soul of the sons of men. Just outside its walls, He condescended to die in agony and in shame, only that He might rise in triumph from His grave; and on a hill hard by He went visibly up to heaven to reign for ever in glory. The death, the resurrection, the ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ, conferred upon Jerusalem a distinction before which all its other titles to interest and to honour utterly pale, and when he termed it "the city of the Great King," and when, foreseeing its approaching ruin, He shed tears at the sight of its walls and of its towers, He conferred on it, in Christian eyes, a patent of nobility, which will only become invalid when His Gospel disappears among men.

But the Jerusalem of Christian thought is no longer only, or

mainly, the city of David. It is, first of all, the visible and universal Church of Christ. The towers and walls and shrines of the ancient city, as faith gazes on them, melt away into the outline of the sublimer prospect, that of redeemed humanity, during all the Christian centuries, gathered and organised into the city of God. This is what St. Paul meant when, writing to the Galatians, he contrasted with "the Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children"—that is, to the Romans—"the Jerusalem that is above"—or as we should say, the spiritual Jerusalem—"that is free, which is the mother of all." That vast society in whose ample bosom the souls of Christian men from generation to generation find shelter, and welcome, and warmth, and nourishment, is the reality of which the old Syrian city was a material type. This is the Jerusalem of the Christian creed—"I believe in one holy Catholic and Apostolic Church;" this is the Jerusalem of perhaps the greatest work of the greatest teacher of the Christian Church since Apostolic days, Augustine's "Treatise on the City of God." There may be controversies among Christians as to the exact extent and direction of its walls, just as there are controversies among antiquarians as to the extent and directions of the walls of its material prototype, but as to its place in the thoughts and the affections of the true Christian man there should be no room for controversy. No other association of men can have such claims on the heart of a Christian as the Church of God. What if sin and division have marred its beauty and its unity? The old Jerusalem did not cease to be Jerusalem in Jeremiah's eyes because of the sins of priests, of princes, and of people, which he so unsparingly denounced. The factions that rent the city that fell beneath the legions of Titus did not kill out the love and the loyalty of its noblest sons. The true remedy for disappointment and sorrow on the score of shortcomings and differences within the sacred city is to be found in such prayers as we offer in our holiest service to the Divine Majesty beseeching Him to inspire continually the universal Church with the spirit of truth, unity, and concord. "O pray for the peace

of Jerusalem: they shall prosper that love thee" is surely not less meant for Christians than it was meant for Jews. Christians who, with the Apostle, have good reason to believe that in the membership of the Christian Church they have indeed "come unto Mount Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, and to Jesus, the Mediator of the new covenant," have good reason to cry with a new and more intelligent thankfulness than that of the pilgrim of older days, "Our feet stand in thy gates, O Jerusalem."

And this earthly Jerusalem suggests another city, a true haven of peace, with which the visible Church of Christ is already in communion, and into which all those true children of Zion who are joyful in their King will one day be received. "And," says the evangelist, "one of the seven angels carried me in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me that great city, the Holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. . . . And the city lieth four-square. . . . And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. . . . And I saw no temple therein, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof. And the nations of them that are saved shall walk in the light of it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day, for there shall be no night there. . . . And there shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie, but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life."

May God of his great mercy grant that many of us here present to-day, whose eyes have never rested on the city in which David reigned, and hard by which our Lord was crucified, may meet hereafter in the city above: that, through the grace and mercy of our Divine Saviour, we may enter its precincts,

if not as saints yet as penitents, and that as our hearts rise up in a thankfulness too deep, too strong, for words, to the throne of the All-Merciful, our lips may yet utter the song, ancient but new: "Alleluia! Our feet stand in thy gates, O Jerusalem."

THE PREMATURE JUDGMENTS OF MEN.*

"Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come."—1 Cor. iv. 5.

Almost in its earliest days, and very unfortunately for its highest interests, the Church of Corinth was largely turned into a school of ill-natured criticism. There were several parties in it, each claiming the authority and sanction of a great name, one even, with more audacity than reverence, claiming the most holy name of all—"One saith, I am of Paul, and another, I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Christ." Each party was occupied in finding what fault it could, or dared, with the names appealed to by the others, and thus three of the parties, or some of them, taunted those who clung especially to the name of St. Paul with the suggestion that their much-loved Apostle after all was not faithful. He might be an active preacher and organiser, he might be a person of great versatility and resource, and a great letter writer—all this they were not prepared to deny; but he had one capital defect—he was not faithful, he was wanting, they maintained, in that directness and sincerity of purpose which is indispensable in a public servant of Christ. Now, St. Paul deals with this charge in that paragraph of his letter to the Corinthian Church which is selected for to-day's Epistle. People had better, he says, think of himself, and indeed of all the apostles, not in their personal capacity, but as being, by their office, ministers of Christ and stewards of His sacraments. No doubt a steward must be, before all things,

* Preached in St. Paul's Cathedral, on Sunday afternoon, December 12th, 1886.

faithful; but whether the Corinthians or any other men think him—Paul—faithful or not, matters, he says, very little to him, since he does not venture to decide even for himself whether he is or is not faithful. His conscience indeed reminds him of nothing that obliges him to think himself unfaithful; but then he remembers that this does not of itself prove him to be faithful, since he does not see very far, and he is judged by One Who knows more than he knows, Who, in fact, knows all; and therefore the Corinthians had better give up their habit of thus judging either himself or other men; let them "judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come."

Now this precept against judging others often occurs in the Bible. It is prominent in the teaching of our Lord Himself: "Judge not, that ye be not judged, for with what judgment ye judge ye shall be judged, and with what measure ye mete it shall be measured to you again." And St. Paul himself warns the Roman: "Therefore, thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest," and he asks: "Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth," and he presently adds, "Let us not, therefore, judge one another any more, but judge rather this that no man put a stumbling-block, or an occasion of fall, in his brother's way." These, after all, are only samples of the passages which bear on the subject, and which will readily occur to you.

Now, what is the exact force and import of this precept? Is it meant that we are to form and express no judgment whatever upon human conduct, upon what we see, and hear of, in the world around us? This, it would seem, cannot possibly be meant, and for more reasons than one.

The first reason is that many judgments of the mind, if not of the lips, are inevitable for all of us if we think at all. What is the process that is going on within every human being every day from morning till night? Is it not something of this kind?—Observation is perpetually collecting facts and bringing them under the notice of Reason. Reason

sits at home, at the centre of the soul, holding in her hands a twofold rule or law—the law of truth and the law of right. As Observation comes in from its excursions, laden with its stock of news, and penetrates thus laden into the presence-chamber of Reason, Reason judges each particular; judges it by the law of right if it be a question of conduct, judges it by the laws of truth if it be a question of faith or opinion. In a very great number of cases, the laws of truth and right, as held by the individual reason, are very imperfect laws indeed; still reason does the best she can with them, and goes on, as I say, sitting in her court, judging and revising judgments from morning till night. Probably two-thirds of the sentences we utter, when closely examined, turn out to be judgments of some kind, and, if our mental or moral natures are at all alive, judgments of some kind issue from us just as naturally as flour does from a working corn-mill. How can it be otherwise? God has given to every man a law, or sense of right: as a consequence, every action done by others produces upon us a certain impression, which, when we put it into words, is a judgment. When we hear of a monstrous fraud, of a great act of profligacy, of a great act of cruelty, we are affected in one way; when we hear of some self-sacrificing or generous deed, of some conspicuous instances of devotion to duty, we are affected in another way: we condemn or approve, as the case may be. Woe to us if we do not thus condemn or approve! for this would mean that our moral nature was drugged, or dead. Woe to a society which feels no indignation at evil and wrongdoing, and no enthusiasm for good!—it is in a fair way to go utterly to pieces. Woe to a man who has no eye for the lights and shadows of the moral world, to whom virtue is much the same as vice, or who sees between them only a difference of physical tendency, or only a difference of sentiment or taste!—he is on the road to ruin. "Woe to them," cried Isaiah, "that call evil good and good evil, that put darkness for light and light for darkness, that put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!"

If the moral sense is alive, if the moral nature is sound, it must judge, not with a parade of declamation against the vices of other days or other classes than our own, but with the short, sharp, resolute expression of utter antipathy to that which is in contradiction to its governing law. Not to do this, I say, is to capitulate to the forces of evil, it is to cance the law of right within us. And in the same way, God has given us a law or sense of truth. As to what is true, some of us are probably—through no merit of our own—better informed than others. We are, for instance, instructed Christians and instructed Churchmen, who know and believe the whole body of truth taught by our Lord and His apostles. If this be so, many opinions that we hear around us, contradicting in various senses and degrees the body of truth which we hold with the whole strength of the understanding, cannot but provoke judgments. We approve of agreement, we disapprove of disagreement, with what we hold for truth. Not to do so is to cease to hold truth as true: it is to hold it to be nothing better than probable opinion. In our days, men sometimes think it good-natured to treat truth and falsehood as at bottom much the same thing; but this cannot be done for long with impunity. In the first age of Christianity it was not so—"Ye have an unction from the Holy One," says St. John to the first Christians, "and ye know all things. I have not written to you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth. Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist that denieth the Father and the Son." Now, this direct language of St. John would jar upon the ear of a generation which thinks that something is to be said for every falsehood, and something to be urged against every truth; but like the Athanasian Creed, it is the natural language of those to whom religious truth is a real thing, and not a passing sentiment of fancy. The law of truth with us necessarily leads to our forming judgments no less than does the law of right.

Nor is this all, for in the second place—as indeed you will have already reflected—Holy Scripture stimulates and trains the judicial faculty within us, making its activity keener and wider than would have been possible without it. The great servants of God in the Bible are intended to rouse us to admire and imitate them; and what is this but a judgment of one kind? The sinners in the Bible, from Cain down to Judas Iscariot, are intended to create in us a moral repulsion, not for their person, but for their crimes; and what is this but an emphatic judgment of another kind? And as the Jewish law, by its highest standard, makes the judicial faculty in man more active than it was in the case of the heathen, so Christianity, with a higher standard still, makes it more active in the Christian than it was in the Jew. A Jew might give his wife a writing of divorcement for various causes; our Lord says that this was permitted only for the hardness of men's hearts, and He withdraws the permission. Eminent Jews, like David, were polygamists; our Lord proclaimed anew the original law of one husband and one wife. The Christian cannot help condemning acts—I do not say agents—that violate the law of Christ; not to do so is to renounce that law as a rule of thought and conduct. Perhaps, by the exhortations which are contained in his Epistles, St. Paul has done more than any other writer in the New Testament to rouse and to guide the Christian judgment. A Christian ought, according to the Epistle to the Hebrews, to have his moral senses exercised so as to discern between good and evil. The most serious charge brought by the Apostle against the Church of Corinth was that the Corinthians had not taken to heart a notorious case of incest which had been brought under his notice—"Ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you." Evidently the Apostle wished the faculty of moral judgment to be very active at Corinth if it was to issue in such practical consequence as this. And, indeed, human society has always found it necessary to lay

upon some of its members the duty of judging others. Every day of term cases are heard and judged in our law courts before the time. Is this to contravene the teaching of St. Paul? Is it not clear that, without some such officer as a judge, associated human life would be impossible? Differences will arise, crimes will be committed, human nature being what it is, even when it has been renewed and blessed by Christ; and, unless differences are adjusted, and crimes are punished, human society will go to pieces. No, a judge, so far from being an unchristian functionary, is the organ, within certain narrow limits, of the judgment of the human and Christian conscience; I say within certain narrow limits, because he can only deal with human actions so far as they do or do not traverse the law which, wisely or less wisely, as the case may be, in different times and countries, society has made in order to protect itself. What these actions, which he judges, are in themselves, what they are before God, what He is thinking about them now, how He will deal with them hereafter—of all these a human judge, as a judge, knows nothing; he has no pretensions to be a moral inquisitor; his duty is to administer the law of the land. In this last capacity he is most assuredly not traversing the precepts of the Gospel, unless, indeed, the law of this or that country, in this or that particular, should unhappily be opposed to them. What, then, is the Apostle's exact meaning when he bids the Corinthians "judge nothing before the time"? The point is, what does he mean by "nothing"? What is the class of judgments no one of which is permitted to a Christian? Some of the Corinthians, let us remind ourselves, were saying that the Apostle himself was not faithful, was not sincere. If they had merely said that he did not teach the truth, he would have argued the matter out with them as he did with the Judaisers in Galatia; as it was, they undertook to decide what was the character and worth of his motive, and therefore he bids them "judge nothing,"—that is, nothing of this purely internal character—"before the time, until the

Lord come." Our Lord would drag bad motives from their obscurity, our Lord would bring to light the hidden things of darkness, our Lord would show in the full light of day the real motives upon which all before His throne had acted, our Lord would make manifest the counsels of the hearts. It is this, the judgment of that which does not meet the eye, the judgment of characters as distinct from acts, which is forbidden by our Saviour and His apostles. If we witness an act of theft, we must say that it is an act of theft, and that Almighty God will punish it; if we are asked to say further what is the moral condition of the thief before God, the answer is by no means so easy. There are serious reasons for our hesitating to give any answer at all, for that thief may be already, like his penitent predecessor of old, preparing for death in earnest, and with a promise of Paradise whispered in the ear of his soul. One reason which makes it difficult for all of us to judge the characters, as distinct from the acts, of other men equitably is this—we are seldom, if ever, without a strong bias ourselves. We have, as the phrase goes, "our likes and dislikes," and only those men who have a very strong sense of justice try to keep this tendency well in hand before they speak or act in relation to others. We, perhaps, flatter ourselves that we only really dislike that which is evil, or which we believe to be evil. Goodness often comes to us in a very unattractive garb, with a rough manner, with a coarse dress; and we think too much of the garb in which it comes to do justice to what it is in itself. Evil comes to us dressed up in the best possible taste, with the tone and distinction of good society everywhere apparent in its movement and expression, and we shut our eyes to its real character for the sake of its outward charm. Are we sure that we always welcome virtue, even when it is not presented to us disagreeably? Just let us reflect that, whether we know it or not, each man of us has a weak side, as we call it, a tendency to some one kind of sin. If we watch ourselves we are pretty sure to discover that this tendency exerts a

subtle influence on our judgments of others. We do not heartily welcome virtues which we instinctively feel condemn ourselves. If our tendency be to vanity, we find it hard to do justice to the humble; if to sloth or sensuality, we disparage the ascetic; if to untruthfulness, we make fun of the scrupulously accurate; if to uncharitableness, we vote those who say the best they can of their neighbours very dull company. We assume, without exactly knowing what we do, that the virtues which cost us little or nothing to practise are the most important virtues, and that the vices which contradict those very virtues ought to be judged with the greatest severity. We think little, or at any rate we think less, of those portions of Divine law which we find it hard to obey, which, perhaps, we do not obey; we are disposed to treat violations of them in others with great tenderness. Who does not see that bias like this disqualifies us for honest, equitable judgment of character, and that it warns us not to attempt to judge character "before the Lord come."

And another reason which makes a true judgment of the real moral condition of a fellow-creature so difficult is our necessary ignorance of all his circumstances. If circumstances do not decide or force human action—and they certainly do not the human will, being what it is—they do nevertheless influence it very seriously. Natural temperament is sometimes a protection, sometimes a temptation; home is sometimes a temple of holiness, sometimes a very furnace of evil; education may be a training for heaven; it may be such a training as would make heaven odious, even if it were attainable. The balance of passions in one man's physical frame, the balance of natural qualities in the understanding and in the heart of another man, the grace which has been given or which has not been given, the friends who have been near us at critical times in our lives to give our career a good or, it may be, a fatal turn, by a hint, by a word in season, by a sneer, by an innuendo never since then forgotten—all these things enter into the serious question how far circumstances excuse

or exaggerate guilt, how far they account for or enhance what there is of good in us. Who of us would dare, with his eyes open, to attempt an answer in the case of any human being we know, however intimately? One eye only can take a full and equitable account of circumstances. He knew what had been the circumstances of the penitent thief when He said, "This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." He knew what had been the circumstances of Judas when He said, "It were better for that man if he had never been born." As for us, we do not know, we only guess at the real sum of circumstances, inward and outward, which affect any human life; and therefore we had better "judge nothing" as to character, "before the time, until the Lord come."

And a third reason is that we see only the outside of life and character in those whom we judge, and whom we know, as we think, perhaps, most intimately. This consideration tells, of course, in two directions. Sometimes under most unpromising appearances there is a fund of hidden good. We all of us have known people, I suppose, with a manner so rude as to be almost brutal, whom we have afterwards discovered to have very tender and charitable hearts; and persons are certainly to be found in London who have a great reputation for stinginess but who really save up their money that they may give it to the poor without letting any other human being know that they do so. In the same way, we have met people whose conversation was uniformly frivolous, or at least wanting in seriousness, and yet it may be that this is the effect of a profoundly serious, but shy, reserved nature bent on concealing from any human eye the real, severe, self-scrutinising, life that is within. On the other hand, outward appearances may be uniformly fair while concealing some deep secret evil that is eating out the very heart and the soul, like an organic disease which is at work upon the constitution while the bloom of health still lingers on the cheek. Every man who has tried to serve God must know and deplore the contrast between his real self and the favourable reputation which he enjoys among

his friends, and must experience something like relief when now and then he gets abused, it may be quite unjustly abused, since in this way he feels at any rate the balance is partly redressed. We cannot anticipate God's judgments in either direction. He alone knows His elect; He alone knows who will be finally parted from Him for ever. He looked of old on a Pagan and He said, "Lo! I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel." He looked on some of those who had the greatest reputation for goodness in His day, and He pronounced them "whited sepulchres," which, indeed, appear beautiful outward, but within are full of dead men's bones and of all uncleanness. He said that the first on earth would often be the last hereafter, and that the last would be first.

You may here remind me of our Lord's words, "By their fruits ye shall know them." Yes, but know whom, or what? Is our Lord speaking of the human character, and telling us that a man's acts are always a clue to his inmost self? No. He is speaking of false prophets; and He tells us that the goodness or badness of human actions is a guide to the worth of the systems which produce them; He is giving us a test of doctrines. As for character, it is by no means always or adequately to be measured by acts. The Pharisee's good acts were more numerous, more indisputable, than those of the publican; but the publican's inward disposition was his justification before God.

And, once more, there is a soul of every action,—the intention with which it is done. It is the intention which gives to our acts their real human meaning, their moral worth. Apart from its intention an act is merely the production of an animated machine. We cannot say that an action is really good, although it may be good in its outward form and drift, until we know something of the purpose with which the agent went to work; and thus many actions, in themselves excellent, are corrupted by a bad motive. Prayer is a good action, so is fasting, so is almsgiving, but we remember what our Lord said of those who prayed, or gave alms, or fasted, to be seen

of men. Let us first ask ourselves what was our motive in coming to this cathedral this very afternoon. There is only one motive which Almighty God would accept,—a desire to serve Him and to approach nearer to Him. Was that motive ours? If we take two-thirds of the acts on which we pride ourselves to pieces, and ask ourselves quite honestly why we did them, what will, what must, the answer be? This surely is a very serious question since a bad motive destroys the acceptableness of an act, however excellent in itself, before God. On the other hand, certainly a good motive cannot transform an act, in itself bad, into a good act. A lie remains a lie, even if we tell it with a pious motive; murder is murder, even though its object be to rid the world of a tyrant or an assassin. All that a good motive can do is to soften the character of a bad act in certain circumstances. St. Paul says that he obtained mercy for the acts of cruelty and oppression of which he was guilty in his unconverted days, because he had persecuted the Church in the good faith of ignorance, believing himself to be thus doing God's service. Oh! what a mysterious, unknown world is the world of motives, the world of intentions with which men act Human law is justly shy of this undiscovered region; it touches the fringe of it, but reluctantly, now and then, as when it essays to distinguish between manslaughter and murder. But what do we really know about it? and in our ignorance how can we possibly undertake to judge the inward life of others before the time?

On two occasions St. Paul might seem to have violated the spirit, if not the letter, of his own precept. When, during his last visit to Jerusalem, he was pleading his cause before the Jewish Council, the High Priest, Ananias, illegally commanded him to be smitten on the mouth; and hereupon St. Paul addressed him as a "whited wall," that is to say, a hypocrite, since he expressed anxiety for the law which he was actually breaking. If St. Paul subsequently apologised for not recognising the High Priest, he did not apologise for so

describing a person who had acted as the High Priest had acted. And so when at an earlier date Elymas, the sorcerer of Paphos, was doing what he could to prevent the conversion of Sergius Paulus, and enjoying a reputation for goodness to which the Apostle knew he was not at all entitled, St. Paul addressed him in public as full of all subtlety and wickedness, a child of the devil, an enemy of all righteousness. The acts both of the High Priest and of Elymas had afforded the Apostle grounds for his language, and yet if you and I had been on both occasions in his place, such language about individuals would have been at least wrong in us. The truth is that on such occasions the Apostle was acting under the guidance of a high inspiration, which entirely discovered to him the real character of the men with whom he was dealing, but which it would be contrary to humility and good sense in you or me to assume that we were possessed of. If our Lord said to His hearers, "Ye hypocrites," as He did say to them more than once, Christians at least believe that He saw in the men whom He thus addressed, He saw them through and through, saw them so perfectly that there was not a trace of possible injustice in his description. And, if at times this power of discerning spirits was imparted to His apostles, it is clear that they are not, when exercising it for certain good purposes, forgetful of their own teaching to their flocks; it is clear, too, that they are not examples for us to imitate.

"Until the Lord come." Yes, only when He comes will there be a judgment at once adequate and universal. Well is it for us that we have not to trust to any of the phrases that are sometimes proffered us as substitutes for the last judgment. 'A judgment of Conscience!' Yes, but whose conscience? 'What probability is there that the wrong-doer's conscience will do justice to his victim, and how would it profit his dead victim if it did? "A judgment of Posterity!" Lazarus would have deemed the judgment of Posterity a poor exchange for the bosom of Abraham; and how would you or I be bettered, if

we were wronged in this life, by the judgment of Posterity. Posterity, the chances are, will know nothing whatever about us. Posterity forgets all in the generations that precede it, save a few names of historic eminence that float upon the surface of the past. With these it does busy itself, and it may be that hereafter some such, now living, will receive a measure of justice which is denied them by contemporary opinion, while others who are much on the lips of men will be consigned to a relative insignificance. Posterity does judge the few eminences of a past age; and our days have seen various attempts to rehabilitate a Tiberius, an Alexander VI., a Richard III., a Henry VIII., an Oliver Cromwell. But whether Posterity is right or wrong, what does it matter to those most concerned? They hear nothing of its favourable or unfavourable verdict, they have long since passed before a higher tribunal than that of the modern literary phantom which thus absolves or condemns them. And what about the millions of whom Posterity never hears, but who have no less need of, and claim on, justice than the few names that survive in literature? Surely it is well that we may look forward to something better than "a judgment of Posterity."

"Until the Lord come,"—yes, He can do that which we cannot do; He can judge men as they really are. He has been appointed to judge the world in righteousness, because He is what He is, the sinless man, and, withal, infinitely greater. There is no warp in His perfect humanity, whether of thought or temper or physical passion, that can for a moment affect the balance of His judgment. There is no sin or weakness to which He has a subtle inclination or of which He will ever exaggerate the evil, nor is He ignorant of any circumstances that excuse or enhance the guilt of each who stands before His throne. He has had His eyes all along upon each one of us, as of old upon the women of Samaria, up to the very moment when she met Him at the well of Jacob. And He can form, not merely an outward, but an inward estimate of us, for now on the throne of Heaven, no less than

in the days of His earthly life, He knows perfectly what is in man. He has no need to make guesses about us; He sees us as we are. He is never misled by appearances; He has searched us out and knows us; He understands our thoughts long before, and therefore when He does come His Judgment will be neither superficial, nor inequitable; it will carry its own certificate of perfect justice into the inmost conscience of those whom it condemns. He will bring to light the hidden things of darkness; He will make manifest the counsels of the hearts. In view of this judgment, we may well shrink from judging, before the time, that which really lies beyond our ken, the inner condition of those about us. To climb up on the Throne of the Judge of quick and dead is something worse than a waste of time. It were better to act on His own warning by judging ourselves as unsparingly as we may have been tempted to judge others, that we, too, may not be judged. We know that He Who did not abhor the Virgin's womb, and overcame the sharpness of death, will also come to be our Judge. "There is mercy with Thee, O Lord, therefore shalt thou be feared; and therefore we pray Thee to help Thy servants whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood."

THE BEGINNING AND THE END.*

"And He said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end."—Rev. xxi. 6.

In the passage before us, St. John hears the announcement of a completed work—"It is done." He has been gazing at the vision of the New Jerusalem; the first heaven and the first earth have passed away; the proclamation has gone forth, "Behold the tabernacle of God is with men;" all tears are wiped away from human eyes; there is to be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, nor pain, since the former things are

* Preached in St. Paul's Cathedral, on Sunday afternoon, December 5th, 1886.

passed away. As the seer listens, He that sitteth upon the throne saith, "Behold, I make all things new," and then another brief utterance, and then a further pause, and then "He said unto Me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end."

Now, it is not within our purpose to inquire too narrowly into the whole reference of these words in the vision of Patmos. This, at least, they do mean—that an old state of things had ended, that a new world had begun: "It is done." When, at an earlier stage of the great vision, the seventh angel had poured out his vial into the air, there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven from the throne, saying, "It is done." In either case the close of an epoch is proclaimed; the knell of a dispensation, of a probation, of a struggle, sounds through the sphere which lies outside time. In either case the voice of God falls on the ear of the soul with a solemnity which is all its own: "It is done." There are other moments in the Bible, two especially, at which God is represented as pausing after bringing one great district of His work to a completion. Such a moment was that which closed the week of Creation,—"On the seventh day God ended His work which He had made, and rested on the seventh day from all His work that He had made." Such a moment was that on Calvary when, hanging on the cross, He summed up in one word His own everlasting purpose for our redemption, and the long series of humiliations and efforts, of teachings and examples, of acts and sufferings, whereby He had willed to work out that purpose to its very end: "It is finished." And as at the beginning of time, and as in its mid-career, so, once more when time is passing away, and all that has been is finally precipitated into its enduring form, the word sounds from heaven once more, "It is done."

"It is done." There is often a difficulty not of the reason so much as of the imagination, in thinking that any thing will end, or at least any thing in which we are actively interested. Reason, of course, knows that we are living in a world of

change, that nothing continueth in one stay, that memory and observation equally report to it changes which presage an end, if remote, yet surely inevitable; but imagination often will refuse to entertain, and to dwell upon, broad and importunate, but unwelcome facts. Imagination is beset and possessed by the pressure of present interests and hopes for the immediate future, of all that belongs to self. And let us remark that the world of thought has its fashions just as much as the world of poetry, or of music, or of dress; and just now any thing that anyhow can call itself "Evolution" is as fashionable as it was in the days of Lucretius. Men look out for a graduated sequence in the course of events. Catastrophes, we are told —catastrophes are discredited. Why events ever began to succeed each other at all, to what events are tending as their final goal—these vital questions are never raised; but this one-sided way of looking at the facts of life is seized upon greedily by the imagination, which thus will clog and choke the equitable action of the reason, will throw unwelcome facts into an arbitrarily-chosen background, will involve plain conclusions in some cloud of mystic indefiniteness, and will thus create a confidence that, somehow or other, things will for ever go on very much as they do.

Now this appears, first of all, in the power we many of us have of putting aside altogether the thought of death. That other men may die—yes, that is intelligible, we see of course that they do die; but that "I" shall die, that a day will come when these senses, which for so many years have been the organs of the soul within, will have ceased to act, when these eyes will never see another sun, these ears never hear another sound, when these hands, these feet, will lie motionless and cold in the first stage of advancing decay—this is hard to imagination. Imagination, which can carry us off into some private dreamland in which fancy and caprice run an unrestricted riot, will at times be so paralysed and benumbed as to refuse to contemplate the very plainest facts; and thus it happens that a vast number of men never think seriously

about the most certain of all the events that await them in their earthly life, the event that will bring it to a close; the most certain, I say, of all the events that await you and me is our death. You are a young man or woman just entering life; will you be, some little time hence, admired, well spoken of, or the reverse? You do not know. Will your family life, some years hence, be a centre of warm affection, or a scene of unspeakable discomfort and misery? You do not know. Will your health be sound and buoyant, or will you spend several years in a long struggle with disease and pain? You do not know. Will you sustain overwhelming reverses, or will you float down your appointed years enjoying an even tenor of success? You do not know. Will you be the first of your own generation to die, or its last survivor? Will you linger on when all who have known and loved you in your youth are withdrawn? Will you linger on, perhaps with a sore heart, longing for the summons which fails to come? You do not know. You do not know how you will die, or when, or where, in your bed, or in the streets, or in a railway accident or by a flash of lightning, whether to-night, to-morrow, ten years hence, fifty years hence, in peace and resignation, trusting in the completed work of our Lord Jesus Christ, strengthened for your last passage by His sacraments, or in terror and bewilderment, without any light from Heaven to guide you through the gloom. All these circumstances are unknown to you, but of the inevitableness and certainty of death itself you are, or you ought to be, as well assured as of your own existence. "It is appointed to all men once to die,"—this is one of those sayings of Scripture which the wildest unbelief has not essayed to question. "It is appointed"—yes, at a certain day, hour, and moment, we each of us shall die. The exact moment is known now, but not to us. We shall know it first of all by experience, when we shall become aware of the approach, stealthy or rapid, of a sense of internal collapse and ruin; we shall experience the advancement of overwhelming darkness, the felt retreat of life, first from this

sense or organ, and then from that, the trembling hold upon the little that remains, and that must presently be forfeited, the last spasm, the last sigh; and then another scene, strange and unaccustomed, beyond all that the imagination can conceive, opens out upon us, an utterance as from the throne above will sound through the depths of our being: "It is done."

There was an old custom, universally observed fifty years ago, but now, I fear, somewhat disused, the custom of tolling "the passing bell" at, or as soon as possible after, the moment of death. It came down, that custom, from days when men had a robust belief in the power of prayer, in its efficacy to bring help and strength to others at all times throughout a human life, and especially in the last agony. It was a summons which, with each stroke of the bell, seemed to say, "A man is passing through the most awful of all the experiences that await us men; pray for him, Christians, pray. Already he sees sights, he hears sounds which you, too, one day will see and hear; you may help him, you know not how much, on his road, if so be, to light and peace; pray for him, Christians, pray." But the passing bell had another meaning. It proclaimed that another soul had come to the end of its probation, that all its sorrows and joys, all its trials and advantages, all its triumphs and its failures, its virtues and its sins, had reached their appointed term, that it had crossed, or was crossing, the line which parts time from eternity; it implied that already that life lay spread out in its completeness before the eye of the infallible Judge like a river tracked from its source in some remote mountain glen, flowing by villages, flowing by cities, receiving tributaries great and small, watering pastures, and at last, in its full volume of waters, burying itself in the ocean beyond. All, all is over now; something more wonderful than the largest star or sun, the moral probation of a soul, is over. Each stroke of the bell echoes the voices of the angels, echoes the voice of God—"It is done," "It is done."

And the same difficulty of entering into the fact that that which exists now, and here, will come to an utter end, appears in our way of thinking about organised human life, about society. Many a man who looks forward to his own dissolution in a vague sort of way falls back in his heart on the reflection that at least society will last on after him as the home and stay of those who bear his name, whom he loves, and who love him. It is, indeed, difficult to see what precisely society will do for him if it does survive him, and yet there is a touch of generosity in his care for it, mingled, however, with a somewhat cowardly unwillingness to recognise the real isolation of death. But we Christians know that one day human society, in its parts and as a whole, will come to an utter end. This is a sort of catastrophe which many men find it especially difficult to anticipate. You study a section of human history, you mark man's progress from a lower to a higher stage, you observe the steps of social and political growth, the order and symmetry of human progress as society presses along the path of accumulating wealth, of scientific discovery, of enlarged personal and political freedom, of nobler sense of all that lies within the compass of rightly-associated human life—the task of imagination in conceiving that it will all utterly end becomes increasingly difficult. It looks so stable and so strong, so vigorous, so justly self-reliant, so based upon high courage, upon keen sagacity, upon hard common-sense, that nothing, it seems, can avail to shake it. So with the Egyptians under the kings of their ancient monarchy; so with the Tyrians, whom Isaiah and Ezekiel warned, confident in the credit and range of their commercial greatness; so with the Persians under Cyrus, and the Romans under the greater Cæsars, and the French under Louis XIV. To the subjects of Vespasian and Titus, and to the Roman people for many a day afterwards, the social structure of the Empire seemed to be at least as strong as the masonry of their own Coliseum, which has survived it for more than a thousand years; and the old nobility of France never dreamed of breaking up in a Reign

of Terror when it thronged the gardens of Versailles to make the court of the Great Monarch. It is with human society as with individual human lives. "The day of the Lord cometh as a thief in the night." "It is," as our Lord warned us, "as in the days of Noah, when men ate and drank and married and were given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all." Certainly there are symptoms, which may be noted from time to time, and which show how fragile is this or that portion of the social fabric, and so suggest how much nearer ruin the whole may be than we generally allow ourselves to suppose. It is so easy to put out of account that which is not obtruded upon the sight, to make no allowance for the unforeseen, to assume that the apparent is the real, and that the real of to-day is always permanent; and so men drift on until something happens that startles the world out of its dream of security, and as an old *régime* breaks up and disappears beneath the waves of revolution, or a throne that has been raised on a million bayonets is humbled to the very dust, a voice sounds from above, to those who have ears to hear, which foretells a more universal and a final ruin.

And still more difficult do men find it to accustom themselves to the conviction that one day this earthly home on which we live will itself be the scene of a vast physical catastrophe. "The day of the Lord," says St. Peter in the Lesson for to-morrow morning's service, "the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up." The course of nature — the phrase itself helps to disguise from us the truth — the course of nature seems so ascertained, and, within certain limits, so unvarying, that the mind recoils from the thought that one day all this ordered sequence of movement, of life, of growth, and of decay, will suddenly cease, buried in the ruins of a vast catastrophe. And the difficulty, let me again say, really resides

in the reluctant imagination. But this imagination always looks out, always makes itself much more respectable, when it gives itself the airs of reason, especially the airs of scientific reason, and so talks about the reign and perpetuity of physical law. Law, it seems, will effectually prevent the occurrence of any such catastrophe; it could only, we are told, be anticipated even by an Apostle in an unscientific age. Now, let us observe that such a catastrophe need by no means imply the complete cessation of what we call law, but only the suspension of some lower law or laws through the imperial intervention of a higher law. We see this suspension of lower by higher laws constantly going on around us; indeed, it is an almost necessary accompaniment of man's activity on the surface of this planet. You and I never lift our arms without so far suspending and defying the ordinary operation of the law of gravitation; and constantly in our industrial activity, in our railroads, in our steamboats, we hold powerful laws in check by invoking the assistance of other laws, until, perhaps, some fine day the repressed law escapes for a moment from our control and crashes in upon us with a terrible revenge. St. Peter, when arguing against the scoffers of his day that because all things continued as they were from the beginning, therefore the promise of Christ's coming had become practically worthless, points to the flood, points to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. And yet these catastrophes were brought about by the operation of existing laws; and if this was so, is it inconceivable that He, in Whose hands and Whose workmanship we are, should have in His illimitable universe other and more imperative laws beyond even those which more immediately surround our puny life?—moral laws which have their roots in the necessities of His eternal being, and not mere physical laws which He has made to be just what they are according to His own good pleasure. Is it inconceivable that a day should come when these royal, these ultimate laws of His should override the lower, bursting in upon them with the decisive

authority of the perfect and supreme will, and wrenching that natural order of things which seems to us so stable and so fair? Ah! there are occurrences from time to time in this our earthly home which may suggest to us the possibilities of a greater and a world-embracing catastrophe. Earthquakes are not things of remote antiquity. Even your little children can remember what their parents may have told them of the mighty convulsions by which a fair island off the coast of Italy was made, not long since utterly desolate, by which in the Eastern Archipelago the very surface of the globe was changed, large tracts of country, covered by large populations, being submerged beneath the sea, while new islands and promontories were thrown up from its very depths. Nay, this very year—as the accustomed charities of the Mansion House may remind us—this very year the tremendous subterranean forces which are ever at work beneath the crust of our globe, have burst up through the surface with savage impetuosity, in one moment in Greece, at another in Chicago, as if to remind us that a broad belt of insurrectionary fire runs along under the very countries of Europe which are the home of man's most advanced civilisation, and that where a man's empire over nature seems to be most completely assured and established, it is, when well considered, frail indeed. In presence of a great earthquake, how powerless is man, how utterly do his wonted resources fail him, how tragically does his very knowledge add only to his weakness and confusion, by making him only the better able to comprehend his utter impotence, his inability to escape from, or to arrest his doom! And do not such occurrences suggest to us a greater and more overwhelming theme, when not this or that portion only of the globe will be laid desolate, when, after a scene of final and universal ruin, the words will be heard from out the throne, "It is done"?

These are the three elements involved in the Christian representation of the second coming of Christ: the end of all human probations, the final dissolution of the organised

or social life of mankind, the destruction of man's present home on the surface of the globe,—there is nothing in them, to say the very least, violently contrary to our present experience, nothing more than an extension of the facts of which we have present experience. Individual life abounds with the presages, with the presentiments, of death. The aggregate life of man, human society, contains within itself many a solvent which threatens its ruin, and the planet which we inhabit is a ball of fire, which may easily one day pour out over its fair surface the pent-up forces which already surge and boil beneath our feet. And when all is over, what will remain? "He said unto me, It is done; I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end." God, the Almighty, the All-wise, the Compassionate; God, the Infinite, the Immeasurable, the Eternal Father, Son, and Spirit, undivided essence; God remains. Before aught was made, He was as He is; He will be as He is when all this present order of existence shall have passed away. The beginning—it is from Him that the planet on which we dwell, the society of which we form part, the souls and bodies which are ourselves, draw their being; the end—it is for Him that all exists, His good pleasure is the reason and warrant that any being exists that is not Himself. And when the creatures of His hand vanish He still is. He sits above the waterflood of human life, reigning a King for ever; He sits above it and its busy labours, its boisterous agitations, its insurgent passions, its madness and its scorn, its frivolity and its insolence, its forgetfulness of Himself, its defiance of Himself, its loud-voiced, foolish blasphemies against Himself, these die away, they die away upon the ear, and, except that they are recorded in His book, they are as though they had never been, and yet He remains. He is Omega as well as Alpha, He is the end as well as the beginning, He will have the last word after all. He is not merely a spectator, He is Judge, the most instructed and the most equitable, still a Judge. He will have the last word, the word of Mercy and the word of Justice.

There are two principal reflections which you should try, dear brethren, to take home with you. One is the insignificance of our present life. We understand this when we look back on it. We most all of us spend our time in looking forward, and anticipation is like a magnifying glass, it makes all earthly objects look much larger than they really are; we only understand their true littleness when we have handled, when we have passed them. That success in literature, that new token of social consideration, that fortune, that personal decoration, that title, that opportunity for some cherished indulgence,—how it loomed big in the distance while as yet it was future, and now you have attained your wish and you look back upon it, and it fills not the heart, not even the eye. It is done. And so in long tracks of time, we look forward eagerly to a coming year, we have plans, schemes, and visions, cares in view which light it all up with interest, we look back when it is passed, and little, or rather nothing, remains but the mark which it has left upon our characters. It is natural that, so long as they can, those who believe in no future life should exaggerate the worth of this; it is indeed their all, and when before their eyes it begins to break up and despair, they have no resource but despair. But we Christians have a hope, sure and steadfast, of a future which is infinitely greater than this present, and which can assure to our immortal spirit true union with Him Who is the true end of its existence, a satisfaction which is here impossible for us. The instability and perishableness of all human things are but a foil to the eternal life of God. When a calamity befalls him or his, a pious Moslem will exclaim "God alone is great"; and we Christians do well to think over all that disappoints us here in the light of the prophet's description of that day when all save God will be seen to be insignificant. "Enter into the rock, and hide thee in the dust, for fear of the Lord and for the glory of His majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled and the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day. For the day of the Lord

shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up, and he shall be brought low; and upon all the cedars of Lebanon that are high and lifted up and upon all the oaks of Bashan; and upon all the high mountains and upon all the hills that are lifted up; and upon every high tower and upon every fenced wall; and upon all the ships of Tarshish and upon all pictures of desire. And the loftiness of man shall be bowed down and the haughtiness of men shall be made low; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day."

And the other reflection is the immense importance of life. Yes, this life, so brief, so transient, so insignificant, so made up as it is of trifles, of petty incidents, of unimportant duties, is the scene upon which, in the case of every one of us, issues are decided, the importance of which it is impossible to exaggerate, issues immense, issues irreversible. It is this conviction which in Christian eyes invests every life with interest and dignity, which makes the career of the poorest and the humblest as important, when looked at from this, the loftiest point of view, as the life of the greatest in the land; it is this conviction which supplies the answer to the Secularists' criticism upon Christian ideas of life, that they direct our attention so engrossingly to the world beyond the grave as to unfit us for the duties of this. No; this is not the legitimate or natural effect of Christian faith. If it refuses to regard this state of being as in itself utterly insignificant, it never, never can think of it as of less than of the highest importance when regard is had to its consequences. Here, under the gloomy skies of our northern home, we may be training for that world that needs no sun, since the Lamb is the light thereof; here, within the narrow bounds of a few years of time, we decide, by using God's grace or by neglecting it, what we are to be for ever; and, when the short space allotted to us has passed, we, too, shall hear, each of us, the voice in judgment or in mercy, "It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end."

May we learn to keep in view both the insignificance of life and its transcendent greatness—its greatness in its capacities and prospects, its insignificance in itself; and may He, Who has made us for Himself, enable us by His grace to resolve, this very Advent, that we will begin to live in good earnest for Him, for Him Who at the first came among us that He might redeem us by His blood, for Him Who will come again to judge us among the great company of the living and the dead.

Sermons

BY THE REV. H. P. LIDDON, D.D., D.C.L.,

Canon of St. Paul's.

THE PLACE WHERE THE LORD LAY.*

"Come, see the place where the Lord lay."—MATT. xxviii. 6.

THIS invitation was addressed to St. Mary Magdalene and her companions when they visited the tomb of our Lord early on the morning of Easter Day. On the previous evening, when the Sabbath had ended, they had bought some scented ointments in order to complete, according to the wonted usage of the Jews, the preparation of their Master's body for the grave. He was already in His grave, but He was not covered with earth. He was not enclosed in a coffin: He merely lay in a recess hollowed out in the rock where Joseph of Arimathæa had placed Him on the evening of Good Friday. Joseph had probably been forced to do his work hurriedly, in order to get it done before the Sabbath came on. He had contented himself with wrapping the body in fair linen, and hastily covering it with some preparation that might preserve the bruised and mangled flesh from the rapid corruption that might naturally be looked for. Mary Magdalene and her companions came to

* A Sermon preached in St. Paul's Cathedral on Sunday afternoon, April 10th, 1887.

complete what Joseph had begun; to re-arrange, with more care and attention to detail, the position of the body in its last resting place, and, while doing this, to cover it with such preservatives against decomposition as would ensure its integrity for many years to come. Now, Mary Magdalene and her companions would have expected to have to encounter at least one difficulty, for they had watched the burial on the evening of Good Friday; they had even noted how our Lord's body was laid. They would have observed how, under the direction of Joseph of Arimathæa, the doorway which formed the entrance to the tomb had been closed up by a large stone which, as filling an opening of some four feet in height by three in breadth, could not have been moved by fewer than two or three men. They could not hope to roll away such a stone by themselves, and how were they at that early hour to procure the necessary assistance? Their anxiety did not last long. "When they looked," says St. Mark, "they saw the stone was rolled away," and St. Matthew explains that "the angel of the Lord descended from heaven and came and rolled back the stone from the door and sat upon it." The stone seems to have been rolled into the first or outer chamber of the tomb, where the angel was sitting upon it when he addressed the holy women. "Fear not ye," he said to them, "fear not ye, for I know that ye seek Jesus which was crucified: He is not here, for He is risen as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay."

I. "The place where the Lord lay." No other spot on the surface of this world can equally arouse Christian interest. Rome and Athens have glories of their own. They say much to the historical imagination: they say little by comparison to all that is deepest in our nature, little to the conscience, little to the heart. Sinai and Horeb, Lebanon and Hermon, Hebron and Shechem, and the valley of the Jordan, and the valley of the Kishon, have higher claims on Jews and Christians from their place in the history and in the books of the chosen people;

but dearer still to us Christians are Bethlehem and Nazareth, and Jericho and Bethany, and Tabor and the Hill of the Beatitudes, and Bethsaida and Capernaum, and Gethsemane and Calvary, and yet the interest even in these must pale before that which attracts us to the tomb of Jesus. When, in the middle ages, the flower of European chivalry, and among them our own King Richard, set forth on that succession of enterprises which we know as the Crusades, the special object which roused Europe to this great and prolonged effort was the deliverance, not so much of the Holy Land, as of the Holy Sepulchre from the rule of the infidel; and when a Christian in our day finds himself in the Holy City, what is it to which his eager steps first and naturally turn? There is much, indeed, on every side to detain him, but one spot there is which gives to the rest the importance which in his eyes they possess; one spot compared with which the site of the temple itself is insignificant; he must take the advice of the angel of the sepulchre, he must "come, see the place where the Lord lay."

"The place where the Lord lay." What is it like at this moment? We may linger for a few minutes on this topic before we pass on to the graver considerations beyond. Under the larger of the two cupolas of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem there stands what is to all appearance a chapel twenty-six feet in length by eighteen in breadth. It is cased in stone; around it is a row of slender pilasters and half-columns, and on the summit is a crown-like dome. At the east end of this chapel a low door opens into a small square room, called "The Chapel of the Angel," because here the angel sat on the stone that had been rolled inside from the door of the sepulchre. At the western end of this ante-chamber is another much lower door leading into the sepulchre itself. The sepulchre itself is a vaulted chamber about six feet by seven, and the resting place of the holy body of our Lord is on the right side as you enter, and is now covered with a marble

slab, which serves as an altar. Indeed, the sides and the floor of this sepulchral chamber are cased in marble, which hides the rock beneath. Immediately over the slab there is a *bas relief* of the resurrection, while forty-three lamps of gold and silver hang from the roof and shed a brilliant light in what would have been otherwise a perfectly dark vault. No doubt it all wears a different aspect from that which met the eyes of Mary Magdalene. Then there was only a low rocky ridge, the boundary of a small suburban garden, in the face of which rock the tomb was excavated. Since then all the ridge, except that which contains the tomb itself, has been cut away in order to form a level floor for the great church. Mary saw no incrustation of architectural ornament, she saw no marble, no lamps; only a tomb of two chambers, one inside the other, cut out of the face of the rock. Thus it is that, as the ages pass, human hands, like human minds, are wont to surround whatever is most dear and precious with creations of their own, but, like the native rock inside the marble, the reality remains beneath! If the surroundings are thus changed, the original spot, the original tomb, still remains. And, if Christian pilgrims from well nigh all the nations of the world still seek it year by year, and if prayer and praise is almost incessantly offered around it, in rites and tongues the most various, the most dissimilar, this is because its interest to the Christian heart is beyond that of any other spot on the surface of this globe: it is "the place where the Lord lay."

"Can we believe," someone asks, "that this is really the place where the body of the Lord was laid after His death?" Why not? Christendom, East and West, has believed it, at least since the year of our Lord 335. In that year the first Christian Emperor, Constantine, completed the church which the historian Eusebius tells us he made up his mind to build on this spot immediately after the Nicene council. At its consecration a great many bishops came to Jerusalem, and Eusebius among the rest, and no doubt was entertained by

them that this was the genuine tomb of our Lord. Then the question arises: How did Constantine and his bishops know that the sepulchre over which he built the church was really the sepulchre of our Lord, and not of some one else? And one answer which is sometimes given to this question, as by Robinson, is that the site was revealed to Constantine by a miracle, and that, as the miracle may at least conceivably have been a pious fraud of some kind, there is no certainty that the presumed site was the true one. Robinson quotes a letter of Constantine to Micarius, who at that time was Bishop of Jerusalem, in which the historian speaks of the golden discovery of the sign of the sacred Passion of the Redeemer as miraculous. But the allusion in this expression is to the real or supposed finding of the wood of the cross. Constantine says nothing about the finding of the sepulchre, nor is there any real ground for thinking that it ever was discovered at all, for the simple reason that its position had never been lost sight of. The wood of the cross might well have been buried and forgotten, and, if it was ever to be certainly identified, some extraordinary occurrence might be necessary to identify it; but the burial place of Jesus was not likely to have been lost sight of. Constantine was not further removed in point of time from the date of the earthly life of our Lord than we are from the reign of Queen Elizabeth, and we know pretty well where most people who attracted any public attention during her reign were buried. The Jews, like the Egyptians, took especial care to preserve memorials of the dead. St. Peter, in his first sermon, alludes to David's sepulchre as being "with us even unto this day." Would St. Peter, think you, or those whom he taught, have thought less of the site of the sepulchre of David's greater Son? Would not each generation of Christians have learned and handed on to their successors all that was known about it? Above all, would not the great Alexandrian school of teachers, which diffused so much light and knowledge in the first ages of the Church, have kept its

eyes steadily on a matter of some real import like this? Even in those days a visit from Alexandria to Jerusalem and back might have been easily taken, weather being favourable, in three weeks; and men like Pantænus, Clement, and Origen, would have learned and believed from personal observation, or through others, all that could be learned respecting the exact scene of the momentous event which was the keystone of the religion which they taught. No doubt it was notorious amongst the Christians that until the days of the Emperor Adrian, about the year of our Lord 132, a temple of Venus had been built on this very spot, and this building, after desecrating it for something less than two centuries, was finally removed by Constantine, who uncovered the tomb in the rock beneath, and, in the ruin which fell upon Constantine's church at the time of the Persian invasion and of its successor, there is no reason to think that the site and identity of the tomb itself was ever lost sight of. There are, of course, other opinions on the subject. The late Mr. Fergusson—a name never to be mentioned in St. Paul's except in terms of honour—maintained, with great ability, what scholars have generally come to consider a paradox, namely, that the true site of the sepulchre was that of the present so-called Mosque of Omar in the temple area. A more plausible opinion, warmly upheld among others by the late General Gordon, is that it is in a garden at the foot of the striking hill which is just outside the gate of Damascus. This site is so much more picturesque and imposing than the traditional one that, had there been any evidence in its favour in Constantine's day, it would certainly have been adopted. The old belief is likely to hold its ground unless one thing should happen. We know that our Lord was crucified and buried outside the gate of Jerusalem. The Epistle to the Hebrews points out the typical importance of His suffering "without the gate." If excavations ever should show that the second, that is, in our Lord's Day, the outer wall of the city embraced the site of the sepulchre within its circuit,

then it would be certain that the traditional site is not the true one. At present there is not much chance of these necessarily difficult excavations being made, and while no one can speak positively, high authorities believe that the real direction of the second wall is that which Constantine and his advisers took for granted. We may, therefore, continue to hold with our forefathers that the chapel which has been described under the larger cupola of the Church of the Sepulchre does really contain the place where the Lord lay.

My brethren, there is a mental relish and satisfaction in having definite convictions about everything that relates to the work of our Divine Redeemer. But, if any one here be otherwise minded as to the site of His tomb, the point is not of vital import. It does not touch necessary faith, and herein it differs from the consideration which next claims our attention. Even if we should disagree about the scene, God grant that we may be of one mind as to the fact of the resurrection!

II. "The place where the Lord lay." It is the central sanctuary of the Christian faith. No other spot on earth says so much to Christian faith as does the tomb of our Lord. Observe, it is "the place where our Lord *lay*." He lies there no longer. He was not lying there when the angel addressed Mary Magdalene. With most tombs the interest consists in the fact that all that is mortal of the saint or hero or the near relative rests beneath the stone or the sod on which we gaze. Of our Lord's sepulchre the ruling interest is that He no longer tenants it. It is not as the place in which He lies, it is not even chiefly as the place wherein He lay, it is as the place from which He rose that the tomb of Jesus speaks to faith. Let us suppose,—it is a terrible thing for a Christian even to suppose—but let us suppose that our Lord Jesus Christ had been betrayed, tried, condemned to death, and crucified, that He had died on the cross and had been buried, and that, instead of rising the third day, had lain on in His grave day after day, week after week, year after year, until corruption and the worm had done

their work, until nothing was left of His bodily frame, save perhaps a skull and a few bones and a little dust. Let us suppose that that was proved to have happened to Him which will happen to you and me, which does happen as a matter of course to the sons of men, to the wealthy and to the poor, to the wise and the thoughtless, to the young and the old—that which certainly happened to all the other founders of religion and martyrs—to Socrates, and Confucius, and Mohammed, and Marcus Aurelius; what would be the result on the claims and works of the Christian religion? If anything is certain about the teaching of our Lord, it is certain that He foretold His resurrection, and that He pointed to it as being a coming proof of His being what He claimed to be. If He had not risen His authority would have been fatally discredited; He would have stood forth in human history—may He forgive me for saying it—He would have stood forth as a bombastic pretender to supernatural sanctions which He could not command. If He had not risen what would have been the meaning of His death? Even if it still retained the character of a martyrdom it would have been only a martyrdom. Its value and its force would have been limited to the example it set before others. It could not have been supposed to have any effect in the invisible world; to be in any sense a propitiation for human sin. The atoning virtue which, as we Christians believe, attaches to it depends on the fact that He Who died was more than man, and that He was more than man was made clear to the world by His resurrection. As St. Paul tells the Romans, He was powerfully declared to be the Son of God in respect of His holy and Divine nature by His resurrection from the dead. If He had rotted in His grave what must we have thought of His character as a religious teacher? He said a great deal about Himself which is inconsistent with truthfulness and modesty in a mere man. He told us men to love Him, to trust Him, to believe in Him, to believe that He was the Way, the Truth, and the Life, to believe that He was in God the Father,

and the Father in Him, to believe that one day He would be seen sitting on the right hand of God, and coming in the clouds of Heaven. What should we think of language of this kind in the mouth of the very best man whom we have ever known? What should we think of it in our Lord Himself if He was, after all, not merely, as He was, one of ourselves, but also nothing more? He proved that He had a right to use this language when, after dying on the Cross, at His own appointed time He rose from the dead. But it is His resurrection which enables us to think that He could speak thus without being intolerably conceited or profane. It may be said that, at any rate, the worth of the Sermon on the Mount is independent of the character of the teacher who addressed it, that that sermon retains its fresh and lofty teaching whatever was the place of its author in the scale of being. Is this so? Surely the preacher of that sermon makes an extreme, if not an intolerable, claim, if He has not some superhuman right to make it when He sets aside the sayings of "them of old time," when He sets aside the words of the ancient and the Divine law with His own personal authority: "But *I* say unto you——" No, there is no ground for thinking that Christ's credit as a Teacher can be saved when His Resurrection is denied. Faith in the resurrection is the very keystone of the arch of Christian faith, and, when it is removed, all must inevitably crumble into ruin. The idea that the spiritual teaching, that the lofty moral character of our Lord, will survive faith in His resurrection is one of those phantoms to which men cling when they are themselves, consciously or unconsciously, losing faith, and have not yet thought out the consequences of the loss. St. Paul knew what he was doing when he made Christianity answer with its life for the truth of the resurrection. "If Christ be not risen," he said, "our preaching is vain; your faith is also vain."

And, brethren, we need not fear to encounter the tremendous alternative. The empty tomb of Jesus recalls an event which is as well attested as any in history. It is so attested as

to put the idea of what is called "illusion" out of the question. The main purpose, the first duty, of the Apostolic ministry was to witness to the fact that Christ had risen. The Apostles did not teach the resurrection as a revealed truth, as they taught, for example, the doctrine of justification; they taught the resurrection as a fact of experience, a fact of which they themselves had had experience. And this is why the different Evangelists do not report the same appearances of our risen Lord. Each one reports that which he himself witnessed, or that which was witnessed by the eye-witness on whose authority he writes. Put the various attestations together, and the evidence is irresistible. That which these witnesses attest must be true, unless they have conspired to deceive us, or are themselves deceived. The idea that they are deceived, however, cannot be entertained by any man who understands human character; the idea that they were themselves deceived is inconsistent with the character of the witness which they give. No doubt there are states of hallucination, states of mental tension, in which a man may fancy that he sees something which does not in fact present itself to his senses. The imagination for the moment is so energetic as to impose upon the senses an impression that corresponds to that, whatever it be, which creates an emotion within the soul. Nay more, the New Testament itself speaks of inward revelations, sometimes during sleep, sometimes during the waking hours, as was that rapture, of which St. Paul wrote, into "the third heaven, whether in the body I cannot tell, or whether out of the body I cannot tell—God knoweth." But the accounts of the appearances of our risen Lord do not all admit of either of these explanations. If He had been seen for a passing moment only by one or two individuals separately, only in one set of circumstances, under one set of conditions again and again repeated, then there would have been room for the suspicion of a morbid hallucination, or at least of an inward vision. But what is the real state of the case? The risen One was seen five times on the day that He was raised from the dead; He was seen a week after; He was seen more than a month after that; and frequently, on many occasions, during the interval; He was seen by women alone, by men alone, by parties of two and three, by disciples assembled in conclave, by multitudes of

more than five hundred at a time; He was seen in a garden, in a public roadway, in an upper chamber, on a mountain, in Galilee, on the shore of the lake, in the village where His friends dwelt. He taught as before His death, He instructed, He encouraged, He reproved, He blessed, He uttered prolonged discourses which were remembered, which were reported, He explained passages of Scripture, He revealed great doctrines, He gave emphatic commands, He made large and new promises, He communicated ministerial powers, and they who pressed around Him knew that His risen body was no phantom form, for He ate and drank before them just as in the days of yore, and they could, if they would, have pressed their very fingers into the fresh wounds in His hands and feet and side. In short He left on a group of minds, most unlike each other, one profound ineffaceable impression, that they had seen and lived with One Who had died indeed and had risen again, and that this fact was in itself and in its import so precious, so pregnant with meaning and with blessing to the human race, that it threw in their minds all other facts into relative insignificance; it was worth living for, it was worth dying for. "That which we have seen and heard, that which our hands have handled, that declare we unto you." This was their concurrent testimony, and their testimony can only be set aside if the ordinary laws of evidence are set aside by which we judge of the worth of other facts and experiences. It can only be set aside by some *a priori* doctrine which tells us, on abstract metaphysical grounds, what is deemed to be possible to be, or possible to be believed, and so decides that a miracle is not possible. Surely, my brethren, our common sense might tell us to judge what may be by what has been proved to be, rather than to disbelieve what has been proved to be in deference to some abstract theory of what may or may not be. The actual, after all, is a safer criterion of the possible than the possible of the actual. "I might disbelieve the resurrection," said a shrewd man of our day—certainly with no very ecclesiastical, I fear with no perhaps very religious, bias—"I might disbelieve the resurrection, if without it I could possibly explain the existence of the Christian Church." Yes, if Christ did not rise, the existence of the Christian Church is unaccountable. The hopeless discredit and failure attaching to the

crucifixion, if the crucified One did indeed rot in His grave, would have made it impossible, I do not say to set about the conversion of the world, but to interest any sensible person in the streets of Jerusalem. As it was, when men looked on that well-remembered tomb in the little suburban garden close to the hill of execution outside the city gate, they knew that it was empty, and Christians wrote over the entrance those words of the angel: "Come, see the place where the Lord lay; He is not here, He is risen."

Certainly no human eye witnessed the tremendous scene itself—the flush of warm life passing suddenly over the cold and pallid frame, the opening eyelids, the reanimated cheek, the raised arm, the sudden resistless vitality of every limb, the flash of life which, as the earthquake rumbled beneath, and before the stone had yet been rolled away, burst utterly and for ever the fetters of death, and sprang forth into freedom and into victory. Certainly none saw how more literally than ever before in human history the Lord then waked as one out of sleep; but that some such scene must have taken place is certain from the well attested appearances of our risen Lord. And no spot is so precious to faith as this, where experience is not faith's rival, but her servant, and where faith plants her feet with triumphant certainty on the soil of earth that she may forthwith mount as with an eagle's wings to the heights of Heaven.

III. "Come, see the place where the Lord lay." No other place is in an equal degree a stimulant to Christian endeavour. Not the mountain of the Beatitudes—though the words uttered upon it must still stir human souls to their depths—not Capernaum—though no other town has witnessed so many works of the Divine mercy—not even Calvary—though, as the scene of the highest revelation of Divine love on earth, Calvary stands alone—more than these does the place where the Lord lay provoke Christian endeavour—endeavour directed to personal and social improvement, endeavour which would promote the glory of God and the highest good of man. And why? Because of all effective endeavour, Hope must be a main ingredient, and Hope nowhere learns so successfully to resist the pressure of the shock of disappointment, and to reach forward with confidence into the unexplored future, as at the very tomb

of Jesus. Had He been crucified without rising from the dead, Hope, in the eventual triumph of truth and goodness, must perforce have died away from the hearts of men. But, as it is, the resurrection is a warrant that, if the heaviness of spiritual discouragement should endure for a night, the joy of spiritual success, patiently awaited, cometh in the morning. So it is with those who, while endeavouring to live the new life of Christ, are fighting hard and battling against untoward circumstances, against strange insurgent passions, against deeply rooted, and, perhaps, very evil habits, against some fatal weakness or warp of the will. Fail they must, if they essay to fight that battle in their own strength, but they can do all things through Christ who strengtheneth them, and the Christ who strengtheneth them is not only Christ the Teacher, Christ the Example, Christ the perfect Sacrifice, He is also the risen Christ, risen for their justification, and to this end making them a free present of His resurrection strength. As such a soul, in moments of deep discouragement, comes in thought to see the place where the Lord lay once, to where He lies no more, it learns to understand its share in His great victory, and to expect with confidence that He will take it out of the horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and will set its feet upon the rock, and will order its goings.

And so, too, in enterprises undertaken for the good of others, enterprises which seem to be stricken with the note of failure, which fail over and over again, which we are tempted to give up as a bad business. Do not give up that enterprise, be it what it may, if you can dare to offer it, if you have offered it, to God, as intended to promote His glory and the good of your fellow men. Do not give it up. There was darkness over the whole world on the day of Calvary, darkness which little portended, though it necessarily preceded, the brightness of the resurrection morning. Your enterprise will have its Easter, if you will only have the patience and the grace to wait. Look, look at the empty tomb of Jesus for the secret of its triumph.

We hear sometimes of a service of man which is to be more thorough and effective, more disinterested and ennobling, by being divorced from, or substituted for, the service of God and Jesus Christ. This service of man is to be, it is said, the religion of a future in which God is to be banished, as a dis-

credited phantom, from human thought, as if the service of man could really gain by parting with the most powerful motives which have hitherto prompted it. During the years that followed the outbreak of the French Revolution, and the revolt against Christianity which accompanied it, there was an extraordinary activity in some sections of French society directed to projecting a religion that might, it was hoped, take the place of Christianity. New philanthropic enthusiasms, new speculative enthusiasms, were quite the order of the day. On one occasion a projector of one of these schemes came to Talleyrand. Talleyrand, you will remember, was a bishop who had turned sceptic, and so had devoted himself to politics. But, whatever else is to be said of him, Talleyrand possessed, in a very remarkable degree, a keen perception of the proportion of things, and of what is and is not possible in this human world. Well, his visitor observed, by way of complaint to Talleyrand, how hard it was to start a new religion, even though its tenets and its efforts were obviously directed to promoting the social and personal improvement of mankind. "Surely," said Talleyrand, with a fine smile, "surely, it cannot be so difficult as you think." "How so?" said his friend. "Why," said Talleyrand, "the matter is simple: you have only yourself to get crucified, or anyhow put to death, and then at your own time rise from the dead, and you will have no difficulty."

Let us Christians endeavour, my brethren, at this bright and glorious festival, to renew our faith and life at the empty tomb of our Divine Lord. Eighteen centuries have not made His death and resurrection less to the world than they were, nor did the world ever need to know their true value and import more than it does now. The wants of the living, the precious memory and love of the dead, the hope of a purer, stronger life here, the hope of a brighter life hereafter, alike draw our thoughts to that blessed spot where the First Begotten of the dead won His great victory.

May He of His grace and mercy bless whatever of clearer faith or of nobler purpose this Easter may have brought to any of us, and so lead us onwards and upwards to Himself, "Who liveth and was dead, and behold He is alive for evermore, and He has the keys of hell and of death."

HOLDING BY THE FEET.*

"Behold, Jesus met them, saying, All hail! and they came and held Him by the feet and worshipped Him."—MATT. xxviii. 9.

THIS is the continuation of St. Matthew's account, which began with the visit of Mary Magdalene and her companions to the tomb of our Lord, and which we were considering on Easter Day. We left these holy women listening to the angel, who was addressing them as he sat on the great stone which had been rolled inside the first, or outer, chamber of the sepulchre. The angel, you will remember, invited them to "come and see the place where the Lord lay;" but he also told them to "go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead." Now, this last command, it would seem, was only addressed to the companions of St. Mary Magdalene. It would seem that Mary Magdalene herself, on seeing that the tomb was open, had at once set out to inform St. Peter and St. John that some unfriendly hands had taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre. These two Apostles thereupon visited the sepulchre in the manner which St. John has described at length, while Mary herself followed them, and met our Lord Himself in the garden. When, then, Mary had set off on this her errand, her companions first entered the tomb, and then, in obedience to the bidding of the angel, went out of it quickly, "in fear and great joy," and ran to tell the news to the disciples generally. It is probable that, instead of entering Jerusalem by the gate that was certainly close to Mount Calvary, they made their way for some distance outside the walls so as to enter the city by another gate further removed from the scene of the crucifixion, that in this way they might escape unwelcome notice. Their path would have lain close under the walls, and as they followed their path with such speed as they could command, they were suddenly brought to a stand—Jesus met them, saying, "All hail!" He must very shortly before have appeared in the garden of the sepulchre to Mary Magdalene, as she had now

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returned to the sepulchre after the two disciples, and had mistaken Him for the gardener until she recognised His voice. Now He seemed to be coming to her companions from an opposite direction from that in which they were walking—the truth being that the new condition of the resurrection-body made His movements thus independent of time and distance, and so He met them under the city walls with the greeting, "All hail!" and they came and held Him by the feet and worshipped Him.

Now, this second appearance of our Lord after His resurrection to the companions of Mary Magdalene may seem at first sight to be one of the least moment of those recorded in the Gospels, and yet it has a lesson to teach us which well may occupy our thoughts this afternoon.

I. And, first, there is the question, not therefore irreverent even if it cannot be answered with certainty, why our Lord should have appeared to this particular group of women at all. They were not persons of the first importance among His followers, they did not comprise His blessed mother, or His great penitent, St. Mary Magdalene; they were not, like Simon Peter or St. James, called to leadership in His future kingdom; they did not represent anxious inquiry like the disciples on the Emmaus road, or earnest or perplexed counsels like the disciples in the upper chamber, or the importance of numbers, like the five hundred in Galilee. They had neither personal authority nor high office, nor representative weight to recommend them. Why should our Lord have appeared to them? The answer to this question is probably to be found in His words to them, which are, in fact, an endorsement, almost a repetition, of the words of the angel at the sepulchre. As the angel had said, "Go quickly: tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead; and lo! He goeth before you into Galilee, there shall ye see Him," so our Lord, presenting Himself as actually risen, said: "Fear not! Go, tell My brethren that they depart into Galilee: there shall they see Me." It would seem, therefore, that our Lord appeared to confirm, by His personal authority, the command of the angel at the sepulchre, and to bless the holy women for having obeyed it. Yes—we may dare to say it,—He appeared to them because they were engaged in the performance of

unwelcome duty. Their errand was not without danger. It was dangerous to be associated, in however subordinate a capacity, with the discredited cause of the Prophet of Nazareth. Still they went. Their hearts clung to the empty tomb; they would fain have stopped there, but they were bidden to go and bear a message to the disciples; so they went, although they did not know how they would be received. They might be repelled as the weak victims of a palpable imposture or illusion. Still they went; and because of their simple, brave, unhesitating obedience, Jesus put on them an honour which He withheld elsewhere. He appeared to them before He appeared to any Apostle, He appeared to them immediately after His appearance to Mary Magdalene. He repeated the angel's order so as to show that it was indeed His own, and His appearance assured them that in obeying it they had gained more than would have been the case had they followed their own inclinations by remaining at the sepulchre. And thus we see one of the conditions under which He, our Lord, is wont, now as of old, to visit human souls. He visits them sometimes when they are in deep sorrow, as He did Mary Magdalene; or in great perplexity, as the disciples on the Emmaus road; or in hours of solitude, as St. Peter, as St. James; or at times of anxious consultation, as the disciples in the upper chamber; or even during the strenuous performance of every day and common duties, like the fishermen on the Sea of Galilee; or even when gathered as multitudes by some common religious enthusiasm, as the five hundred in Galilee; but especially does He visit them when they are doing, from a sense of duty to God, that which runs counter to natural tastes and dispositions. Obedience in circumstances of difficulty is often a time of the highest spiritual illumination. The soul sees more clearly into the world beyond the veil when the will is making a real effort to obey a known law of truth, or of duty. As our Lord Himself, said: "If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine;" and He sets His seal on this promise by appearing to the women who, to the best of their power and knowledge, were doing His will. The possession of great personal gifts, of high office in the Church, of prominence of any sort or kind, personal or official, is in no wise necessary to this high distinction. The promise

runs—"They that are meek shall He guide in judgment, and such as are gentle, them shall He learn His way." These poor and humble women were indeed the forerunners of a great company of souls whom Christ our Lord has been wont, in every age of His Church, to meet as they toil along the unfrequented paths of irksome and painful duty. He meets them, cheering them with His smile of encouragement and benediction, saying to their inmost spirits, "All hail!"

II. Jesus met them. How did they receive Him? The fear and great joy with which they had come out of the sepulchre must surely now have been intensified: fear—for here, beyond all question, was He Who was so lately a tenant of the tomb, Who had traversed the unseen world, the world of the dead—and great joy—for here was indisputable proof of the truth of the angel's message, "He is risen;" He was here Himself, the same figure, the same form, the same gracious countenance, lately marred and bruised, now lighted up with an unearthly radiance, the pierced hands, the pierced feet. Their hearts must have echoed to those words of the prophet: "Lo, this is our Lord, we have waited for Him, He will save us." But what did they do? "They came and held Him by the feet, and worshipped Him."

Now, there are three features in this action of these humble and deeply religious women that are especially deserving of our attention.

(1) And, first of all, that which is admirable enough is their forgetfulness of themselves—"Jesus met them, and they came and held Him by the feet, and worshipped Him." He had been everything to them, as to others, before His crucifixion; they had felt, at least as much as others, the blighted hopes, the wounded affections, the shame, the confusion, the all but despair of the day of Calvary; they had gone through experiences of alternating light and darkness, and hope and fear, and weakness and resolution, and trust in God and something like total despondency—experiences at least as varied, as absorbing, as interesting, as distracting as any that we can easily imagine. They met Jesus suddenly, without preparation, without warning, and forthwith they "came and held Him by the feet, and worshipped Him." It was enough for them that He was there, that He had broken

in some way the bars and fetters of the grave, and exulting in the joy of His victory, they had not a thought for themselves, "they came and held Him by the feet, and worshipped Him." Now, had they been modern Christians, such as we all of us must have known, such as perhaps we are some of us ourselves, they would, we may surmise, have acted differently; they would have insisted first of all on telling their Master all that they themselves had gone through since they last saw Him. They would have assured Him that, though He had suffered much for them, they had suffered scarcely less from their sympathy with Him. All their anxiety on the night of the betrayal, all their indignation, their grief, their horror on the day of Calvary, all their deep gloom and anguish, all but hopelessness, during the great Sabbath while He rested in the grave, would have been set forth and displayed at great length before Him. If they had felt for Him, they would see to it that He too should not only feel but express His feelings for them. They would not have parted from Him until some words of sympathy and approbation, something very consolatory and satisfying to themselves, had fallen from Him. To have been utterly silent about themselves, to have fallen before Him without uttering a word, without asking for a word, delighting if only they could hold Him by the feet, and worship Him—this would not have been, to say the least, natural to a great many modern Christians.

And this suggests one of the broad differences between ancient and much of modern Christianity, in which, if the truth is to be told, the latter does not gain by the comparison. This difference is described by those who find a satisfaction in it by saying that the temper of ancient Christianity is "objective," and that of modern Christianity is "subjective." If these imposing words are to be translated into plain English, they really mean that ancient Christianity thought less of self than modern Christianity does think, that ancient Christianity was chiefly occupied with the object of faith, with God, with the majesty, the beauty of God, with His power, wisdom, goodness, His infinite, awful, magnificent life; while modern Christianity is chiefly occupied with the believing mind or subject—that is, with man; with man's changeful thoughts and feelings about God, as though God too, "with Whom is no variableness

neither shadow of turning," changed concurrently with man's ever-changing moods about Him. There is a forgetfulness of self about ancient Christianity which is wanting in the Christianity of to-day; there is a noble, simple joy in God's being what He is which is greatly lacking among us. What are the aspects of Christianity which are dwelt on most nowadays? Are they not almost exclusively the sides of it which touch human life, which secure the possession and satisfaction of the individual soul, or the well-being and comfort of society? Modern Christianity says a great deal more about our justification and assurance, and a great deal less about the eternal and uncreated glory of the Divine Redeemer than was the case in the ancient Church of Christ; a great deal more about the social power of Christianity and a great deal less about what is due to the honour of the enthroned and spotless Lamb; and thus many of the subjects which interested ancient Christians so deeply as concerning what is revealed respecting the inner being of God, and the relations between each other of the three persons in the Godhead, are often referred to by modern Christians in a pitying sort of way as "merely speculative,"—the fact being that the centre of interest has shifted. In those old days God was the centre of Christian thought; and now, I fear, we must say that man is too often the centre. In those old days the Christian soul conceived of itself as a humble planet moving round the central Sun of Righteousness; in these days the Christian soul aims at being itself the sun of the system, while the true Sun of Righteousness is being moved round it, and His beauty, His brightness, are estimated chiefly, if not solely, by the lights and shadows which He throws upon it. Contrast, from this point of view, an ancient and a modern hymn. As a rule, the ancient hymn is occupied with our Saviour, with His person, His attributes, His work, His glory; as a rule, the modern hymn is devoted to the glory, or, at least, to the feelings, of the believer, and our Lord comes into it just so far as His work, or His promises, or His warnings bear upon those feelings, and not otherwise—not for His own sake, not because He is what He is. Contrast, again, the ancient and the modern idea of Christian worship. The modern idea of worship is simply, or chiefly, something out of which Christians can get consolation,

moral stimulus, improvement, something anyhow for themselves. The ancient idea was that worship is an opportunity of rendering some little portion of that mighty debt of homage to God which is everlastingly His due, of "giving thanks to Him"—as we sing in the Communion Service—"giving thanks to Him for His great glory," because He is what He is, and because it is a privilege for His creatures to know Him, and to praise Him, apart from the benefits they derive from doing so. The less we think of ourselves, except as sinners whose need is pardon, whose business is repentance, the better for us. We know, my brethren, what selfishness and unselfishness are in private life; and if the man who, in his intercourse with others, thinks chiefly of what will benefit and gratify them, is a nobler man than the man who thinks chiefly how intercourse with them can be made to gratify himself, then, most assuredly, the old type of Christianity which thought first and chiefly of God's glory and God's truth is an intrinsically nobler and finer thing than the modern Christianity which is mainly concerned with the comfort and satisfaction of the individual believer. And of the disinterested and generous spirit of the old religion of Christ the holy women were an early and beautiful sample, when early on the morning of Easter Day our Lord met them and they, instead of saying or thinking anything about themselves, "came and held Him by the feet, and worshipped Him."

(2) Another feature in the bearing of the women which it is important to notice is their reverence. They held Him by the feet, and worshipped Him. The traitor had presumed to kiss His blessed face while saying: "Hail! Master"; and those who were spiritually furthest from Him had, during His sufferings, taken the grossest liberties with His sacred form, but when St. John saw Him in the vision of Patmos he fell at His feet as dead. True He was now still on earth, but He had not yet been crucified when Simon Peter fell down at His feet and said, "Depart from Me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord;" and these pious women knew enough about Him to know what was really His due when they came and held Him by the feet, and worshipped Him. "Yes, yes," some one says, "but then they were Orientals." Well, what of that? Do you suppose that Orientals are so very unlike other people

that they lavish their devotion, without thought or purpose, on the first person who comes in their way? We English often think cheaply of Orientals in consequence of what we read in books about the practices of Eastern courts. Eastern governments have generally been despotisms, and Eastern monarchs have been for ages, as a rule, approached as beings who have a power of disposing absolutely of the lives and liberties of their subjects. The ceremonial which surrounds a monarch of this kind expresses fitly enough jealousy, suspicion, pride, on the one side, terrified and obsequious servility on the other. But go beyond the precincts of an Eastern court, and you will find that Orientals are much like other people, nay, there are Oriental races which in point of fierce personal independence rival, if they do not surpass, anything of the kind that is to be found in the Western world. The holy women did not take hold of the feet of Jesus and worship Him, because they were Orientals with a strange passionate taste for the ceremonial expression of feeling, but because they were human, and their souls were moved to the very depths by meeting their risen, their adorable, Lord.

What is reverence? Is it an outward posture or the turn of a phrase? Is it the bent head, the bent knee, the subdued voice, the rapt expression of countenance? Is it something which is learned like a lesson, like an art, something that can be put on and off like a dress, something that belongs to the outward, and has no real relation to the inward, man? Most assuredly not. Reverence is a movement of the soul touched by the sense of a greatness that awes it, and of the near presence of which it is at the time especially, overwhelmingly sensible. Reverence is provoked by greatness of all kinds, although in very different degrees. It is paid to lawful authority, to age, to great gifts of mind, above all to elevation of character. It is felt constantly where no occasion or opportunity for its outward manifestation presents itself. It may be felt in its very deepest form, because they are close to the highest object of all reverence, by the sick and dying, who cannot move a muscle, who cannot breathe a syllable to give it fitting utterance. But, when it is real, and when it can do so, reverence will find appropriate outward expression,

and, when outward expression is easy, depend upon it the absence of such outward expression of reverence means the absence of inward reverence. Burke has shown how various attitudes of the human body correspond to, or are inconsistent with, deep emotions of the human soul. You cannot, for instance, sit lolling back in an arm-chair with your mouth wide open, and feel a warm glow of indignation; and, if you or I were introduced suddenly into the presence of the Queen, we should not keep our hats on and sit down with our hands in our pockets, on the ground that the genuine sentiment of loyalty is quite independent of its outward expression. And, if people come to church and sit and talk and look about them while prayers are being addressed to the Infinite, the Eternal Being, it is not really because they are so very, very spiritual as to be able to do without any outward forms. They really do not kneel because they do not with the eye of their souls see Him, the sight of Whom awes first the soul and then the body into the profoundest reverence. After all, there is nothing very spiritual, as some people seem to think, in the practice of outward irreverence. Church rules on the subject are but the natural outcome of a deep instinct of the soul of man when it is confronted by the greatness of its Maker and its Redeemer. And so the act of these holy women was not a piece of tawdry Eastern ceremony, but a natural and human token of the reverence which at that moment controlled all else in their souls at that moment when they saw their loved Friend and Lord risen from His tomb, the Conqueror of death as well as the Conqueror of sin, radiant with the beauty of a world which, if it interpenetrates, is distinct from, the world of sense; and so they held Him by the feet, and worshipped Him.

(3) And a third characteristic of the action of the holy women is their tenacity of purpose. They held Jesus by the feet. They may have supposed, like the disciples, at first that they had seen a phantom of some sort; at any rate, they were not sure what the new conditions of His bodily appearance among them might possibly be, so they held Him by the feet. They took hold of His feet, which they could reach easily, while they fell prostrate before Him, while they worshipped Him. Now it is instructive to compare this with the account of our Lord's interview with St. Mary Magdalene, perhaps not many minutes

before in the garden of the sepulchre. Mary had at first supposed Him to be the gardener, and, when she recognised Him by His voice, she too made some effort to lay hold of Him; whether by His knees or by His feet we are not told. She was at once checked: "Touch Me not, for I am not yet ascended to My Father." A day would come when she might touch Him, most really, though spiritually, and, until that day came, she must wait. There were reasons which made it better for her not to touch His body now, while it had not yet ascended to the heavens, reasons, we must suppose, at least in part peculiar to herself, for on other occasions our risen Lord invited His disciples to assure themselves by the sense of touch of the reality of resurrection. "Handle Me and see," He said to them collectively, "for a spirit hath not flesh and blood as ye see Me have"—"Reach hither thy finger," He said to the doubting Thomas in the Second Lesson for this afternoon, "and behold My hands, and reach hither thy hand and thrust it into My side, and be not faithless, but believing." But Mary Magdalene needed not this kind of assurance, and her spiritual life was fresher and healthier for not being admitted to a particular indulgence of the impulse of affection. God deals with no two souls in exactly the same way. The aids and supports of the Divine life in one soul may be even perilous to it in another. God knows what is best for each one of us, and in thinking of each other as regards this matter, we ought to try and cultivate a generous charity. He Who said to the Magdalene "Touch Me not," presently met her companions, and suffered them, not merely to touch Him, but to hold Him by the feet. They held Him by the feet; they could not do more, prostrate as they were. But they knew that to hold His feet was to hold Himself; that while they held His feet He was there; and so they held on, not looking up at Him, silent, prostrate, adoring.

Here, again, they are an example to many of us Christians of to-day, both in the matter of Christian thought and in the practice of Christian devotion. All that many who own, or, perhaps, I should say, who desire to own, the Christian name can do, amid the perplexities of our day and generation, is to cling sometimes to the feet of Jesus. In other words, they see how and where the religion which He brought from

Heaven touches the soil of earth; they see its points of contact with human history, the blessings it can confer on human society, its power of making men and women live healthy and useful and contented lives, but they cannot get beyond or above this; they cannot reach the hands of Jesus and follow His directing government in His Church and His action in the affairs of the world, still less can they gaze in spirit on His adorable countenance and enter into the outskirts of that great world of thought which is the very soul of His religion. Its creeds are to them in many ways not a comfort and a stay, but a perplexity, and it is surrounded by questions which cause them, as they think, constant disquietude. They can but hold Jesus by the feet; and to such there is but one piece of advice to be given, "Hold Him fast, make the most of what truth you know, even though it be the lowest section of truth, even though it be only the feet of Jesus." For truth is one. Every portion of truth is part of an organic whole, every portion of truth joins on to some other portion, and, if held long enough, persistently enough, will lead you to embrace that portion which joins on to it. You may only hold the feet of Jesus, but still they are His feet Whose head is the seat of eternal wisdom, Whose hands are raised to rule and to bless the world. Not three days since a correspondent wrote to me: "The only thing that now attaches me at all to Christianity is that it alone of the systems of thought with which I come into contact seems to give a working answer to two questions—Whence am I? and Whither am I going? All else is dark, all else at least uncertain." Well, but how precious and how pregnant is this one conviction! Let it but sink into the soul, let it take possession of the thought and will; and it will soon lead the way to other truths. Only believe that you come from the hand of the Almighty, the All-wise, the All-good Creator, Who has made you in such wise that you may offer Him a free service, and may live here for His glory, and may live with Him hereafter in His eternal kingdom, only believe this, and the work of our Lord Jesus Christ, as the Prophet Who teaches you, as the Priest Whose self-oblation atones for your sins, as the King Whose laws it is your duty and your happiness to obey, falls naturally into its place in your thought. Or, as I find another writer saying, "The one

thing in Christianity on which I can dwell with any real satisfaction is the beauty of Christ's human character." Very well, by all means make the most of His human character. But then see what it involves. *Ecce Homo!* Certainly, He is the pattern man; but, on one condition only is He perfect man, namely, that He is also more than man. He says too much about Himself to be a good man, if He is only a man. His character can only be reverenced, in the long run, by those who will open their minds to the truth of His higher nature, to the truth of His Godhead. If He could say with perfect truth, "I am meek and lowly of heart," "I am among you as one that serveth," He could also say, "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father," "I and the Father are one thing." As we hold the lower truth perseveringly, intelligently, tenaciously, it lifts us, as the price of our continuing to hold it at all, to the higher truth with which it is indissolubly linked; and when we have reached this higher truth—the Godhead of our Lord and Saviour—all the rest becomes plain to us, like the promised land which Moses saw from Pisgah: the value of Christ's atoning death, the wonderful grace of His sacraments, the promised perpetuity of His kingdom among men.

And so, too, in matters of devotion. To many, when they begin to lead a Christian life, the only possible prayers are very fragmentary ones—the Lord's prayer, or a bit of it; a few verses in the Psalms; a few hopes, entreaties, resolves, put into natural language. In one case no more prayer was possible than this: "O! God, if Thou art indeed what they tell me, save me, a poor sinner." Well, this is very different, no doubt, from the practice of private prayer which is habitual to a Christian who has served God for years; very different from the stately liturgies of the Christian Church. It is only holding Jesus by the feet. But it has in it the promise of something more. As a lower truth leads on to a higher truth, so feeble efforts of prayer lead on to stronger and worthier efforts. The soul acquires an appetite for spiritual effort, and the supply follows the demand. Indeed, in this matter of prayer, nothing is more important than sheer tenacity of purpose; for the soul has its periods of depression and ill-health just as much as the body, and there are times when it is as hard for

the soul to pray as there are times when it is hard for the body to take exercise. There are times when those faculties of the soul which are motive forces of prayer seem unable to do their work, when thought cannot fix itself on its Divine object, when the affections cannot expand under the eye of the Sun of Righteousness, when the soul seems to be hopelessly flabby or perverse, incapable of any serious purpose or spiritual effort; and at such times the tempter whispers: "What is the good of trying to go on praying when prayer has no longer the soul of prayer in it; when it has become a mere husk, an empty form?" Be sure that to yield to this suggestion is a great mistake. In these times of spiritual dryness and discouragement adherence to the habit of prayer is more than ever necessary. The habit carries the soul safely from one period of spiritual warmth and life on to another. The mere scaffolding is worth a great deal and ought not lightly to be sacrificed because for the moment it is only a scaffolding. If nothing more can be done in hours of spiritual darkness and perplexity, it is possible to hold Jesus by the feet. Presently He will speak words of reassurance and encouragement, and lo! the night of the soul shall be turned into day.

Here, then, are three elements of the true service of God always and everywhere. The true servant forgets self; he bows in his inmost spirit before God's awful greatness; he makes the most of what little truth he knows, of such practices of devotion as are within his reach. Millions of Christians have found in such a law of service the stay, the strength, and, in the end, the perfection of their lives; and it will be well for us too, dear brethren, to take our places, in spirit, this Easter, beside the holy women, trusting to the indulgent mercy of our Lord for an acceptance, which we cannot indeed command in virtue of any excellence of our own, but which, we may be assured, will not be refused to any who love and serve Him in humble sincerity.

SHADOWS OF LIGHT.*

"The Lord my God shall make my darkness to be light."—PSALM xviii. 28.

If we may rightly say so of a servant of God uttering inspired words, we see David at his best in this 18th Psalm. In other Psalms he is in anxious conflict with the enemies of Israel, or he is borne down by sorrows in his home, or he is heart-broken with the sense of personal sin. In this Psalm he sings as a man whom, as the inscription says, "The Lord hath delivered from the hand of his enemies and from the hand of Saul." He can now look back upon the troubled past; he can measure the greatness of the dangers which have beset him, for he is full of inspiring buoyancy and hope. "The sorrows of death have compassed me: and the overflowings of ungodliness have made me afraid. The pains of hell came about me: the snares of death overtook me." In those dark days which preceded his elevation to the throne, David in his distress had betaken himself to God, and had been favoured by a special manifestation of the Divine Being. "In my trouble"—here the Prayer-Book does not help us so well as the Bible—"in my trouble I called unto the Lord and complained unto my God. He heard my voice out of His holy Temple, and my complaint came before Him; it entered into His ears." And what followed? That which passed before David's soul could only be suggested to others by pictures drawn from the natural world. Those aspects of nature which strike dread into the heart of man by revealing to him his weakness and insignificance in presence of the mighty forces amid which he dwells—the earthquake, the volcano, the pitchy darkness of the Heavens, the roll of the thunder, the flash of the lightning, the pitiless onset and torrent of the storm—these might suggest, they could not pourtray, the overwhelming impression of the presence of God, the Deliverer, upon the soul of David. "The earth trembled and quaked, the very foundations also of the hills shook and were removed, because He was wroth; there went a smoke out of His presence and a consuming fire out of His mouth so

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that coals were kindled at it; He bowed the Heavens also and came down: and darkness was under His feet. He rode upon the cherubim, and did fly: yea, He came flying upon the wings of the wind. He made darkness His secret place; His pavilion round about Him was dark waters and thick clouds to cover Him. At the brightness of His presence His clouds removed: hailstones and coals of fire. The Lord also thundered out of heaven, and the Highest gave His thunder: hailstones and coals of fire. He sent out His arrows and scattered them: He cast forth lightnings and destroyed them." This was the purpose and object of the vision. David's deliverance from his enemies was the work of no human strength, of no human skill, but of the unseen Master Whom David served; and therefore he is so buoyant and hopeful as he looks forward into the future. The future, we know, had troubles in store for David; troubles in his family, troubles with his subjects, worst of all, troubles that would come of his own misconduct; but, be the future what it might, David could rest upon the moral certainty that he will still enjoy that illuminating and strengthening presence of which he has had experience in the past. His subjects may be rebellious, his children ungrateful, his trusted counsellors may fail him, his natural powers may yield to the decay which comes with years, but the real strength and consolation of his life will still be with him. Nay, he may be for a while untrue to that light which has shone with such kindly strength in the past, he may be for a while in the judgment of his own conscience a very outcast from the sacred presence, and yet, if he have not parted with the will to serve, if he can but turn and repent, God will give him the comfort of His help again, and will stablish him with His free spirit. "Thou also shall light my candle: the Lord my God shall make my darkness to be light."

Now, this buoyant confidence in that Light that will not fail in the dark hours of life is eminently Christian, and David's words which express it are words which a Christian more than other men may press most closely to his heart; for we Christians know who has said: "I am the Light of the world," and with what reason He has said it. He, our Lord and Saviour, has taught us by appearing among us what God is; He has taught us what man is, and what man through Himself

may come to be. But He has also lighted up the darker mysteries of our human life with knowledge and hope such as, but for Him, we could never have enjoyed, so that we may repeat David's words with a conviction of their truth more intimate and more robust than David ever could feel,—"The Lord my God will make my darkness to be light."

For let us observe that there are three dark shadows which fall across every human life—the shadow of sin, the shadow of pain, and the shadow of death.

I. There is, first of all, the Shadow of *Sin*. It falls dark and thick upon the life of human beings. Sin is the transgression, in will or in fact, of the eternal moral law, of that law which, unlike the law of nature, could not be other than what it is, unless God could be other than what He is; of that law which is not an arbitary enactment of His will, but the outflow of the expression of His very being. Sin thus is the contradiction of God; it is the repudiation of God, the perverse activity of the created will, which, if it were pushed to its natural sequence, would fain, if it could, annihilate God. Only when we thus contemplate the true nature of sin do we feel that after all the language of the Bible about it is not exaggerated, that there is justice and reason in the stern sentence, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." Not that sin, as the Bible represents it, is only or always an act; often it is a state, it is an attitude of the will, it is a temper, it is an atmosphere of the mind and disposition; it pervades thought, it insinuates itself into the springs of resolve, it hangs about conversation; it presides over life where there is no conscious or deliberate intention of welcoming it; it changes its form again and again—at one time it is anger, at another envy, at another sloth, at another outrageous self-assertion, at another mere petty vanity, at another degraded imagination,

> "Beckoning foul shapes and dreams intense
> Of earthly passion."

But throughout it is one in its root and principle—the resistance of the created will to the will of the Creator. And this resistance means darkness, not in the sky above our heads, but, far worse, darkness in the moral nature, darkness in the moral intelligence, darkness at the centre of the soul; and as He who

knew indeed what we are has said, "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness?" This darkness was felt, in the degree possible to them, by the heathen. It explains the vein of sadness which runs through the highest heathen literature, for the heathen, too, could sin, since they had, as the Apostle tells us, "a law written on their hearts," and, when they broke it, they had experience of remorse and shame—remorse and shame, those mysterious protests of the human soul which emerge from its depths, unbidden, unwelcomed, in the train of sin. For us Christians, of course. sin is blacker, and the shame of sin is greater, in proportion, to our higher knowledge of God and of His will. Chorazin and Bethsaida cannot, if they would, be as Tyre and Sidon. In order to escape from this dark shadow, men have often tried to persuade themselves that sin is not what we know it to be, and that conscience which reports it is only a prejudice, or a bundle of prejudices, accumulated during centuries of more or less artificial human life, and not really entitled to the deference and awe with which good men treat it. But this desperate experiment to get rid of the inward monitor does not succeed with any who have carefully watched the inner chambers of the soul, and who know that the imperative secret bidding "Thou shalt," "Thou shalt not," is just as much a part of the soul's very structure as the faculty of thought or imagination or memory. No, the shadow of sin cannot be conjured away by those expedients. It lies thick and dark upon human life, and, sinners that we are, we can only cry out, in words well known to us: "Lighten our darkness, we beseech Thee, O Lord; and of Thy great mercy defend us from the perils and dangers of this night of sin, for the love of Thy only Son our Saviour Jesus Christ."

Has not this prayer been answered? "Behold the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world." "He was made to be sin for us, Who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him." He does not dispel the darkness by obscuring the reality of sin. His cross, which is the cure of sin, is also the measure of its misery. But He does remove it by paying the debt of justice in His own person, and by uniting us to Himself by His gifts of grace, so that His acts and sufferings become really ours.

And, therefore, "if we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins," and upon us, sitting though we were in the darkness and the region of the shadow of death, there shines the sun of His pardoning love, and He our Lord and God in very deed makes our darkness to be light.

II. And then there is another shadow following hard upon the shadow of sin, as being not seldom its consequence—the Shadow of *Pain*. What pain is in itself is a question that cannot really be answered. We know it by its presence, by its effects. There may be persons, high-spirited, young, happily circumstanced, blunt of feeling, without experience of any but the sunny side of life, for whom the pain that is suffered daily, hourly, momentarily, in this our world has no meaning. But for others, and a larger number, this problem of pain is a distressing, even an overwhelming, one which they cannot put away from them. Just let us think for one moment how many thousands out of the four millions of this metropolis are at this moment, while I am speaking and you are listening, in acute pain, whether of the mind or body, and yet what a mere speck are they in the great empire of pain, that empire so ancient, so varied, so unimaginable! It haunts human life, does pain; it dogs our steps from the cradle to the grave; it is the monopoly of no class; there is no insurance against its approach or its ravages. The infant at the breast, the old man bowed beneath his fourscore years, the stupid and the intellectual, the wealthy and the poor, the good and the bad—they all have their share in this inheritance of pain. And pain is not limited to man's bodily constitution. The mind is capable of a sharper pain than any that can be caused by a diseased or wounded body. Nay, pain is not merely human. The lower creatures—of whose real place and purpose in God's universe we know so little—they, too, are evidently subjects of the rule of pain. "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." And as the races and generations pass, whatever else may distinguish them from each other, whatever else they may have in common, they pass each and all, sooner or later, under the weird shadow of pain. How to deal with pain, how to alleviate it, how to do away with it, those have been questions which men have discussed for thousands of years

and anodynes there are, such as they are, for pains of body and pains of mind, anodynes of very varying moral worth, but of which this must be said, that they do but at most curtail the fringe of the great realm of pain. "Man," says a thoughtful modern writer, "man has learned many things, but he has not learned how to avoid sorrow. Among his achievements the safeguard against wretchedness is wanting. Nay, it might seem," he continues, "that the aggregate of man's unhappiness has increased with his increasing culture, and that the acute sensibilities and multiplied sources of distress more than outweigh the larger area from which man's pleasures are drawn and the more numerous means of alleviations at his command." Yes, pain remains on the whole inaccessible to human treatment; and especially does it resist attempts which have from time to time been made to ignore its bitterness. Single men or schools of thinkers may have endeavoured to achieve indifference to pain, or to persuade themselves that mankind at large is mistaken about it; but take men and women as a whole, and however bravely they may strive to lessen or to bear the measure of suffering which comes with duty, which comes with life, they yet will at times utter the prayer: "Lighten our darkness, we beseech Thee, O Lord; and of Thy great goodness defend us from the perils and dangers of this night of pain, for the love of Thy only Son our Saviour Jesus Christ."

Now, our Lord has lighted up with something like radiant joy the sad mystery of pain. Pain in the world of nature often warns against that which endangers life, as is the case with the pain of hunger, or extreme cold, or with an internal disorder. But the Lord of life needed no such warning, and yet He was a sufferer. Pain in the world of men is the consequence of wrong-doing. It is inflicted by bodily disease, by human law, by ruined fortunes, by the reproach of conscience; but our Lord "did not sin, neither was guile found in His mouth." And yet He was a Sufferer; nay, He was the greatest Sufferer that the world has seen. Capacity for pain exists in the degree in which mind and body are highly organised. Man suffers more than animals, the higher races of men more than the lower. With such a bodily frame as His, with such a human soul as His, our Lord must have possessed a capacity

for pain of which our relatively coarse and dull natures can possibly form no adequate conception ; and so the Prophet saw Him, across the centuries, as having "a visage more marred than that of any man, and a form more than the sons of men." As the Man of sorrows, our Lord showed that pain is not to be measured by the reasons for it which we can trace in nature. It has more and larger purposes which we can only guess at. But as associated with resignation, with love, with sanctity, pain most assuredly is the harbinger of peace and joy. On the Cross its triumph was unique; it availed to take away the sins of the world. Beneath the Cross it may even be spoken of as a filling up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ. On the Cross we read two mottoes which transfigure the realm of pain: "By His stripes ye are healed," and, "If we suffer, we shall also reign with Him." For Christian sufferers the Lord our God has indeed made this dark district of human experience to be very light.

III. And, once more, there is the Shadow of *Death*—death which is ever around us, death which sooner or later awaits us all. The thought that death must come at last casts over thousands of lives a deep gloom. There is the uncertainty of the time and manner of its approach ; there is the unimaginable experience of what in itself it will be ; there is the dread of what may or may not follow it. No real comfort is to be had by reflecting that the laws of nature are irresistible. The phrases of the speculative intellect are powerless to heal the wounds of the heart. We may sometimes witness the utter misery which is caused by the visit of death to a family, made up of people of warm and affectionate characters who have parted with Christian faith. Death lays his hand on this son, or that daughter, who had been particularly dear to young and old, and then all those questions are asked by aching hearts, which no mere human speculation can really answer. "What has become of him?" "Does he still exist, or what was the last moment of earthly life, the last moment of existence?" "Can we hope to see him more, or is all really over, as really as though he never had been?" Only one prayer would help those sufferers, if they only had grace to pray it: "Lighten our darkness, we beseech Thee, O Lord, and of Thy great mercy defend us from the perils and dangers of this night of

death, for the love of Thy only Son our Saviour Jesus Christ." The darkness of the grave is not less lightened by our Lord and Saviour than is the darkness of sin or the darkness of pain. He has endured the suffering of death, and for Christians death is no longer dark ; it is the gate of the highest life, and through death Christ our Lord "overcame him that had the power of death—that is the Devil—and delivered them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." The lamp of His dying love is our guide through the gloom. In most generations there appear to be Christians who miss the bright light which is thus shed on us by the Divine Redeemer, as though it were better to grope their way through the darkness of sin, and pain, and death, by the aid of the pale lantern of human speculation. Some well-known illustrations in our own day may readily occur to us, but it is for many reasons better to select some more ancient example of this signal misfortune. For many ages there was no book of merely human authority more highly thought of than the *Consolation of Philosophy*, by Boethius. Not to go beyond the limits of our own country, it was translated in one century by King Alfred, in another by the poet Chaucer, in another, at least partially, by Queen Elizabeth ; and the consideration which it thus enjoyed in England was by no means exceptional ; it was but a sample of the common mind of Europe about it down to the end of the sixteenth century. The popularity of the book was due to the fact that it embodied much of the best wisdom of the old Pagan world, and partly to the tragic circumstances under which it was composed, and which were well fitted to cast a spell upon the imagination of later times. Boethius had been the trusted counsellor of Theodoric, the second and greatest Gothic King of Italy, after the fall of the Western Roman empire. Boethius was probably the most cultivated man of his day, and he stood as high as any in the councils of his brave but illiterate sovereign. He was accused of conspiring to re-establish the old Roman imperial power in Italy at the cost of his Gothic master ; and, upon little or no evidence of guilt, he was thrown into prison at Pavia, where, after lingering for some nine or ten months, he was put to a cruel death. It was during this imprisonment, it was in full prospect of the tragedy which was to close it, that Boethius wrote

the *Consolation of Philosophy*. As we read it we never forget the author's circumstances. He paints, first of all, his own deep dejection, and then personifying Philosophy as a lady of venerable mien, who had the air of having lived through centuries, yet bore upon her still the signs of youthful vigour, he describes her visit to his desolate cell. She sits on the edge of his bed, and, looking sadly into the face of her downcast disciple, she addresses him in words of pity and reproof. He tells her of his trouble, and then she displays the gifts of consolation which she has to offer to the mind of man. True, Boethius has lost everything in his outward condition that had hitherto made his life bright and envied, but then philosophers have always known the worthlessness of external advantages. The highest good—which is not wealth, or office, or friendship, or popularity, or noble birth, or brilliant reputation—is still within the reach of Boethius. To this highest good all else tends; it can be none other but the Supreme Himself. Still there is the fact, Boethius urges, that, in this world, the bad do get on very well, while the good are often cruelly wronged. And here Philosophy does not seem to help him much, as she insists mainly on the Stoic idea that the wise man alone is free, and scarcely dares to hint at a future in which all that is here unequal will be set right. And then there follow discussions in which many interesting things are said about providence and fate, about human free-will and Divine fore-knowledge, until all suddenly breaks off in the fifth book, at the point when the executioner enters the cell to end, at the same moment, the work and the life of the illustrious author. Undoubtedly the treatise on the consolation of philosophy insists that the world is ruled by God, but it carries us no further. It does not really lighten the shadows that rest upon human life. It passes sin by, it deals with pain as the Stoics dealt with it—as something to be somehow ignored or overcome. It has little to say on the supreme mystery of death. It might have been written by one of the more respectable deists of the last century, but in fact it was written by a Christian, who, as we know from other sources, took a keen interest in questions that agitated the Christian Church thirteen hundred years ago, who must have had in his hands the Holy Gospels, the Epistles of St. Paul, the writings in which, two centuries before his time, the

great Augustine had shown to the world the full meaning and power of the inspired records. How is it that in this blaze of light Boethius, in the solemn weeks and months which closed his earthly career, could fall back upon what heathendom had to give—its very best gifts undoubtedly, but after all only the gifts of heathendom? Why is there no mention of the cross, with its atoning virtue for human sin, with its sanctifying power for human pain, with its sustaining consolation for the last agony? Was it that, in the secret soul of Boethius, Plato and Proclus had as high, or even a higher, throne than that which he assigns to our Lord Jesus Christ? Was it that he could not free himself from the literary or academical prejudice which often cannot easily reconcile the simple faith and preaching of the cross with the dainty tastes and requirements of literature? We do not know; but, whatever be the explanation, it is impossible to escape from a feeling of sadness at the spectacle of so beautiful a soul, surrounded by such rich opportunities, yet to all appearance so tragically missing them. To the end of time Boethius remains a typical specimen of those men in Christendom for whom Christ has not made, as He might have made had they only willed it, their deepest darkness to be light.

Sin, pain, death—these are the three shadows that fall across the life of men in this day of preparation for the great future; and that our Lord makes these dark shadows to be light is the experience in all ages of thousands of Christians. St. Paul, for instance, knew that sin was darkness, but he knew also that in Himself Christ Jesus had shown forth all long-suffering. St. Paul was no Stoic in his estimate of pain, "But I reckon," he said, "that the sufferings of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us." St. Paul did not account death as other than terrible to know, but he could write, "I am now ready to be offered up, and the time of my departure is at hand; I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness." For him, beyond all question, the Lord Whom he had served had made his darkness to be light.

We hear fears or hopes, as the case may be, sometimes expressed that in the coming years religion will lose the power

which it has had heretofore over the thoughts and lives of men. "All things change," men say, "in our modern world, and if to-day religion lags behind in the march of change, she will have to follow suit to-morrow. Institutions which assert her presence, the ideas and beliefs which are her life, are doomed to disappear." Well, brethren, we will not now discuss this bold prophecy, but let us observe that at least certain elements of human life, which are matters of our personal daily experience, and which are most intimately bound up with the life of religion, do not change with the advancing years; they remain what they were, unchanged in a changing world. New figures may appear upon the public scene, new ideas may fill the air and govern the lives of the masses of men, the outward form of our civilisation may vary, dynasties may rise, may fall, the centres of power may be shifted, the frontiers of nations may be enlarged, may be contracted, the speech of men, if only sufficient time be given, may become utterly different from what it is or has been. If one man's life could be protracted through three or four centuries the changes which he would witness would be indeed astonishing; he would find himself in very many respects in an utterly new world; but certain things, it may be confidently predicted, would not have changed—they have never been other than what they are. Sin, pain, death, are what they were in the days of the Tudors, in the days of the Crusades, in the days of the Apostles and Evangelists, in the days of David. Sin, pain, death—they are the permanent elements in the life of human beings; and, because they are permanent, religion too will last. Only a robust faith in the unseen, only the faith of our Lord and God, can relieve the human heart when face to face with these solemn and irremovable conditions of our human life. So long as they last, the religion of the Crucified will last too. If the sense of sin could be drugged by a false philosophy, if pain could be forgotten in a sustained ecstasy of self-sufficiency, if chemical science could only arrest the march of death, then the religion of Jesus Christ might die; but, as matters stand, it is too intimately associated with the facts of human life, it strikes its roots too deep into the experiences, most tender and most appalling, of the human heart, to vanish at the bidding of speculation which cannot touch these tre-

mendous realities. So long as men sin, so long as men suffer, so long as men die, Jesus Christ our Lord will be believed in, will be worshipped as the Light of the World, as the Divine Master, Whose teaching and Whose death have made the darkness of human destiny to be light indeed. Only may He of His mercy enable each one of us, while yet we may, to know this by a blessed experience, to know Him, our adorable Lord, as the Conqueror of sin not less than as the Atonement for sin ; to know Him as the Consecrator and Reliever of pain, that at least we may know Him as the perfectly trusted Guide, Who will lead us, too, through the Dark Valley of the Shadow of Death into that world beyond the grave, of which He Himself is for ever the everlasting Light.

THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN.*

"The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself: God, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are."—LUKE xviii. 11.

THE picture which our Lord sets before us in the parable of the Pharisee and the publican shows, among other things, how the Temple was used by the people in His day. The people did not only attend its public services ; they used it as a place of retirement for private prayer when no public rites of any kind were going forward. The Temple welcomed them when they would escape from homes narrow and squalid, in which it was difficult to command solitude and quiet. In the courts of the House of the Lord they might be practically alone, even although amid the company of fellow-worshippers, and might pour out before God the secret sorrows and aspirations of their hearts. Much it is to be wished that the fabrics devoted to the worship of Jesus Christ in this Christian country could be more used for a like purpose than they are, and, in particular, that this great temple, whose doors during so many hours of every day are open to all the world, could be more generally turned to good account by Christians as a welcome

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refuge from the distracting cares of life, as a sanctuary in which weary or anxious souls might often offer their private tribute of prayer and praise to their Creator and Redeemer.

To the Temple, then, went the Pharisee and the publican. Our Lord is describing what was an every day occurrence. In the Temple there was room for all. There the highest and the lowest stood side by side before the majesty of God. And in the Pharisee and the publican were represented the very poles of religious and social respectability; and we are now most concerned with the Pharisee. The Pharisees, as their name *Perushim* implies, were, before all things, men who insisted on their separation from others. They came into existence as a distinct religious sect under the High Priesthood of Jonathan about a century and a half before the birth of Christ. Their ruling idea, their rallying cry, was the duty of avoiding all intercourse with, all assimilation to the ways of, the heathen world. This idea, let us observe, was deeply rooted in the religion of Israel. The prophecy of Balaam was enshrined in the very Book of the Law: "This people shall dwell alone, and shall not be reckoned among the nations." One of the most fatal errors of the Israelites after the conquest of Canaan was that they were "mingled among the heathen and learned their works, insomuch that they worshipped their idols, which turned to their own decay: yea, they offered their sons and their daughters unto devils." Mindful of this experience, the constant effort of religious men in later days was to insist that Israel, as the people of revelation, was a peculiar or separated people, which, religiously speaking, could only be safe so long as it held aloof from the powerful and fascinating societies of heathen men around it. Insistence on this principle entered largely into the reforms of Nehemiah, and it acquired altogether a new vigour during the struggle against the Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanes. Antiochus was bent upon breaking down all the barriers that separated the Jews from his other subjects. He tried to proscribe Jewish observances, and to make the Jews, whether they would or not, live just like pagan Greeks. In the second book of the Maccabees, the reign of Antiochus is accordingly called "the times of the mingling or intermixture," and all the religious men in the country were banded together to resist this attempt

of the heathen king, even to death. The most energetic of these men were called "The Pious," but their fervour soon became narrow, selfish, bitter. It added to the troubles of the great leader Judas Maccabæus, and the name thus discredited soon passed out of hearing. Not quite two generations after, they reappeared as the separated ones, as the Pharisees, and as such they soon embraced within their ranks all the earnestly religious people in the land. They did this so largely that they could scarcely at one time be called a sect. Before the birth of our Lord, they had achieved a position of great influence, not unlike that of the Evangelicals in England some fifty or sixty years ago, and they owed their influence to the fact that they were largely men of earnestness and sincerity, who were upholding a principle which was undoubtedly of great importance to the old religion of Israel.

It is important to notice the motive of the observances and manner of life which were associated with the Pharisees. They eagerly multiplied all the outward signs which could distinguish them from the heathen or from those of their own countrymen who seemed to have a fancy for heathen ways. Taken by themselves and apart from the motive which originally dictated them, many religious observances among Christians would be difficult to explain satisfactorily; and it is due to the Pharisees to remember why they began a century and a half before the birth of our Lord to act as they did in religious matters. Their religious life was throughout a protest, a protest against a prevalent tendency to obliterate the lines which marked off the religion of Israel from sheer heathenism. This was the meaning of the tassels in their dress, this was the origin of the scrolls and the small leathern boxes fastened on their foreheads, their heads, their necks, and inscribed with texts of the law. It was to accentuate this difference that they braved popular scorn or anger by offering long prayers as they stood in the public streets and squares. Their strict fasts reminded them of duties, of truths, of events with which the heathen had nothing to do. Their constant washings recalled to them the idea of moral purity at which a good Jew should aim, and of which heathenism knew nothing. Their distinctive observances were indeed most of them very modern. They were unknown before the Babylonish captivity,

and the fiction which was current in Judæa in our Lord's day, that they had been handed down traditionally from Moses to the great Synagogue and from the great Synagogue to themselves, could only have grown up in an uncritical age when religious men were too intent on a practical object immediately before them to enter on a severe examination of a question of theological or historical truth. But we must not do the Pharisees injustice. In most respects they contrast favourably with their latitudinarian rivals the Sadducees, to whom the majority of the higher members of the priesthood belonged. They were more earnest, they were more anxious for the glory of God, as they understood it, they were more anxious for the good of men, as they understood it, they were more religious, they were more humane. There can be no doubt that some of the best men in the Jewish nation—Gamaliel for example—were Pharisees, and they could never have attained the great moral position which they undoubtedly held in our Lord's day unless they had, or had had, some substantial virtues which were generally recognised.

And this better side of the Pharisees is thrown into sharp relief by the other representative man whom our Lord describes as going up to the temple to pray. No class of men was looked down upon by the Jewish nation with such stern and universal condemnation as were the publicans. The publicans of the New Testament, as you know, were the collectors of the revenue. It was paid by the population of Palestine to their Roman masters. Long before the conquest of Judæa the Roman senate had adopted the bad plan of farming both the direct taxes and the customs to individual capitalists or to companies, who undertook to pay a given sum into the public treasury while making as large a margin of profit as they could for themselves. These capitalists, living in Rome, employed on their own account collectors in the different provinces of the empire, and each collector had a number of sub-collectors under him, who were generally taken from the population of the province. These sub-collectors are the publicans of the New Testament. Zacchæus may have been a collector of the higher order; St. Matthew, before his conversion, was a sub-collector, engaged in the Custom House at Capernaum. The sub-collector made what he could out of

the revenue before he transmitted it to the collector; the collector took from it what he dared before he forwarded it to the agency in Rome which undertook the farming of the taxes. The consequence, of course, was that these sub-collectors generally spent their lives in extracting as much money as possible from the people by whatever means they could. They seem to have had a large discretion in assessing the value of goods which had to pay duty, and to have used their discretion unscrupulously. St. John the Baptist's advice to them, "exact no more than that which is appointed to you," is very suggestive as to their usual practice; and when Zacchæus professed before our Lord that "if he had taken anything from any man by false accusation he restored him four-fold," he glanced at the common practice of his profession of bringing false charges of attempts to cheat the revenue in order to extort hush-money. Thus, in other provinces of the empire, the lower order of publicans was generally spoken of as "the wolves and bears of society," and there was a well-known current proverb to the effect that every tax-collector was a thief. But in Judæa there was a feeling about the publicans of a peculiarly bitter kind and to which nothing corresponded elsewhere. The Jewish Scribes generally held that it was not religiously lawful to pay any money to a heathen Government, and thus the publicans who exacted such tribute were, if they were Jews by birth, regarded as not merely oppressors of the people, but as apostates from the religion of Israel. They were classed, in the common talk of men, with sinners and harlots, and to eat and drink with them was considered to be out of the question, not merely for the Rabbi who expected to be looked up to, but for all decent people. Our Lord, as we know, in His boundless compassion for the erring and the unfortunate, set Himself to correct and to defy the common Jewish feeling about the publicans as about the Samaritans. He was, in consequence, scornfully described as "the friend of publicans and sinners." He did not scruple to meet publicans at entertainments. When He visited Jericho, there were very many priests living there, and yet He chose to invite Himself to the house of the publican Zacchæus; nay, He chose one member of this despised class to be even an Apostle and Evangelist. All this was part of His plan of

showing that he came to save men of all sorts and conditions; that none lay outside the scope and range of His redemptive love. But His merciful conduct, so far from contravening, is an illustration of, the fact that as a body the publicans were men of bad character. They lived on the frontier of the criminal classes, if they did not actually belong to them; and they were none the better for the varnish of official respectability which some of them wore before the world.

The Pharisee, then, as eminently representing the religious world of Judæa, seems to have everything in his favour as he goes up into the temple to pray, and, if the prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, the average publican, it must be owned, seems to have scant title to be heard at all. This, we may be sure, was the feeling of those who heard our the Lord begin with the statement that "two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee and the other a publican." What, then, is the ground of our Lord's decision in favour of the publican? How comes it to be that, in His unerring judgment, "the publican went down to his house justified and accepted rather than the Pharisee?" Clearly there must be some most serious flaw in the case of the Pharisee which can so entirely disturb what at first appears to be the balance in his favour. What is it in the man, what is it in his prayer, that our Lord condemns? Was it his expression of thankfulness? Surely thanksgiving can never be out of place for those who believe in a Being Who is the fountain of all goodness. Thanksgiving is a duty for all times and seasons, it is the occupation of the angels in Heaven, it should be the delight of all good men on earth. It might be better for us Christians if we said more often than we do, after the Pharisee, "God, I thank Thee." Christendom is often more like the nine lepers who never turned back to give glory to God than the one who did. Is it not the Apostle of Divine grace himself who bids us "in everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you?" Have we not just been led to thank God "for all the blessings of this life, but above all for His inestimable love in the redemption of the world through our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace and for the hope of glory;" and if it be a great happiness to know the truth, to know the will of God, or to be free

at least from great offences, is it not well to thank God for this? No, our Lord does not condemn the Pharisee for thanking God. He is much more likely to condemn you and me for forgetting to do so. Nor surely is the Pharisee the worse for not being an extortioner, or unjust, or an adulterer, or guilty of the practices which were common with the publicans. It is not necessary to be indifferent to elementary morality in order to escape what is bad in Pharisaism; and a religion which should make men careless about elementary morality would not be a true or a trustworthy religion. "Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle, or who shall rest upon Thine holy hill? Even he that leadeth an uncorrupt life and doeth the thing that is right, and speaketh the truth from his heart; he that useth no deceit with his tongue and hath done no evil to his neighbour, and hath not slandered his neighbour?" The great preacher of the grace of God tells us as plainly as any writer in the Bible that there are sins which exclude from the Kingdom of Heaven. Our Lord, we may be quite sure, does not condemn the Pharisee because the Pharisee is alive to the difference between justice and injustice, between purity and impurity, between right and wrong. Did our Lord, then, condemn him for fasting twice in the week? Fasting was a duty for good Jews. It was even enjoined by prophets who warned men against trusting too much to ceremonial observances. If the Pharisee fasted more than the rule of his religion required, this, taken by itself, might have been a proof of his earnestness. Fasting, let us remember, is as much a Christian duty as a Jewish. It is as much a Christian duty as prayer. It is not, I admit, a popular duty, but our Lord Himself enjoins it on us in the Sermon on the Mount, and He adds directions which will save it from being ostentatious, or vain-glorious, and so sinful. He would not then have condemned the Pharisee simply because he fasted twice in the week. Was it then that the Pharisee was so wrong in giving tithes of all his produce? In doing this he was obeying the spirit as well as the letter of the Law, which, let us observe, was commonly evaded by the many Jews, who only gave to the service of God a tenth of certain specified products while omitting the rest. Here, too, surely we Christians should do better if we imitated the Pharisee,

if we freely devoted at least a tenth of our yearly income to the service of God instead of giving the little we do give by fits and starts upon no fixed religious principle whatever.

What, then, what was the weak point, what was the fatal flaw, in the Pharisee's case, which ruined so much in him that of itself was excellent, which availed to place him, in the judgment of our Lord, on a lower level than that of the publican? It was this: The Pharisee's religion, as it appears in his prayer, was a religion centring, not upon Almighty God, but upon himself. It was, therefore, properly speaking, no religion at all. In our days, no doubt, people use the word "religion" in a great many debased senses. They speak of a "Religion of Art," of a "Religion of Humanity," of a "Religion of Politics," of your making a religion of anything which you have a taste for; but, properly speaking, religion means a certain relation of dependence and obligation between the soul and God, and when God is left out of the question religion cannot really exist. In true religion, the soul looks out and beyond itself to that great Being Who is, at once in His awfulness and His beauty, the stay and the end of its existence. But the Pharisee, even in prayer, is entirely taken up with himself. Look at him as he walks into the middle of the Court of Israel, as he places himself—so the original word seems to imply—in a chosen position or attitude. He names God, he thanks God—he cannot of course drop the conventional language of devotion,—but he stands and prays there with himself, or rather with the eye of his soul directed towards himself. He is thinking not of God, but of himself. He begins with an expression of thankfulness, but, as we examine it, what an equivocal sort of thankfulness it is! Thankfulness, to be accepted, must go hand in hand with other things. It must be based on a sincere recognition of our unworthiness of the blessings for which we thank God; its heartfelt language must be: "Lord, I am not worthy of the least of all Thy mercies." True thankfulness is accompanied by misgivings on the score of the poor use that has been made of God's blessings in the past, and of the account which must be one day rendered for them; and especially does the thankful man ascribe the blessings of life to the Author of all Goodness. From nothing does he shrink

more unaffectedly than from seeming to claim any credit for himself; but the Pharisee's thankfulness is less an offering made by his soul to God than a conventional way of expressing his profound satisfaction with himself. He begins: "God, I thank Thee." Had he been thinking of God he would have said: "I thank Thee for the grace and help which Thou hast given me, and to which alone I owe it that I have escaped the sins of other men." He does say: "I thank Thee that I am not as other men are;" another Pharisee, who became in his time a Christian apostle, only mentions his place and work to add: "By the grace of God I am what I am. I laboured more abundantly than they all, and yet not I, but Christ, which was with me." The Pharisee of the parable says nothing of what he owes to grace, as he says nothing of what he needs on account of sin.

Consider, again, the man's comparison of himself with others. "I thank Thee that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican." Surely no good is done by remembering the faults of other people, unless it be part of our duty to correct them, or when we are praying to God to help them. To remember them only with the result of reflecting with satisfaction on our superiority to them is indeed folly and presumption. General declamations about the wickedness of others are often unjust. Other people are not so bad as our suspicions or our rhetoric would make them; and pride soon grows apace when, under the cover of deploring the sins of others, we are thinking with satisfaction of ourselves. After all it is not much to have avoided vices to which perhaps we have never been strongly tempted, or tempted at all. It is more useful to compare ourselves with true servants of God, with those who, having had fewer advantages than we to start with, have done much more than we for His glory and for their fellow men. If the Pharisee had remembered that God's judgment of men takes account of their opportunities, he would have felt that he might very possibly be comparing himself with persons who were his superiors. The publican had enjoyed none of his advantages; the publican had been exposed to temptations from which he had been free. It was something that the poor publican had come at all to pray in the House of

God. Surely this might have inspired interest and hope in a zealous Pharisee. It was possible that this publican might be, in God's sight, a St. Matthew on the eve of conversion to a higher truth than he, the Pharisee, dreamt of.

And then the Pharisee so carefully enumerates his good deeds. Like a zealous Jew, he fasted twice in the week, he paid tithes of all that he possessed. Those were good things to do—why should he say anything about it, especially before God? The bloom of a good work is forfeited, as soon as we take credit to ourselves for it. Vanity of this kind is fatal to the real excellence which God approves and accepts. There may be occasions when a good man is forced to refer to what he has done; occasions when God's glory or his own usefulness are at stake, and for such objects as these David, and Job, and St. Paul do so; but the safe rule is to say nothing about our good deeds. No good work is really our own; it is God's work in us; and the best of works may easily be vitiated by some sin which is our own. Some bad motive, some selfish purpose may make what seems so fair to the eye of man worse than worthless before God.

And especially observable is it that the Pharisee asks God for nothing—neither for pardon, nor for mercy, nor for grace. He seems to feel the need of nothing, neither of perseverance in his good deeds, nor of power to multiply them, nor of freedom from the sins which would make them valueless. He is perfectly satisfied with himself, satisfied with what he is, satisfied with what he is not, satisfied with his superiority to other men, satisfied with what he does, satisfied with what he gives. Why should he pray? Prayer is the language of the needy, of the dependent, of the anxious. It means misgiving, deep misgiving, on the score of all that side of life of which he, the Pharisee, has no misgiving whatever. This is the crowning characteristic of his bearing in the presence of God, this is the vice which makes all that he does, all that he is, so utterly unacceptable to God—his unalloyed satisfaction with himself. Compare him with the publican. The publican does not venture beyond the court of the Gentiles. Though he may be a Jew by birth, he creeps just inside the door and stands there, far off indeed, very far off, he is from the Pharisee. He has nothing to say to his own credit. If

he is unlike other men, it is that he believes himself to be worse than other men. He is, or has been in his time, an extortioner, unjust, perhaps an adulterer. He has never fasted in his life, he has never given tithes, or anything else, to the service of God. He feels himself to be outside religion and everything connected with religion. He feels that he has no right to be there treading the sacred pavement, even of the outer court of the Gentiles; he defiles it, he thinks, by his very presence. He has no claim, no title, to consideration or acceptance which he can urge upon the awful Being, within the precincts of Whose sanctuary he has dared to venture. He is so far from being able to look around him for anything that may re-assure him that he cannot even raise his eyes to heaven; he can only smite upon his breast, and condense into three words the greatest of the psalms of penitence: "God, be merciful to me a sinner." And yet the publican's prayer has in it that indispensable quality which the Pharisee's lacks. The publican sees God as Job saw Him when he abhorred himself, as Peter saw Him when he cried, "Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord;" and, seeing God, he offers his prayer, not to self, but to God.

The superstructure of the Pharisee's religion—his freedom from gross vice, his fasts, his tithes—wants the foundation which the publican has. The publican's religion has as yet no superstructure—that will come in time—but he is taking the first essential step—the self-renouncing, self-emptying cry for help addressed to the One Being Who can give it. The Pharisee, notwithstanding the outward purity of his life, and his self-sacrificing activity, is, in consequence of his tranquil satisfaction with himself, much farther from God than is the publican. Both men equally need that redemption which, after a few months, will be offered on Mount Calvary, but the publican's heart is already open to embrace it: the Pharisee's heart is closed.

The Pharisees, as we know them in the Gospels, have long disappeared from the scene of history; but Pharisaism, as a spirit, survives. It wears Christian clothes, it uses Christian language, it is at heart still in the court of the Temple with its eye, not upon God revealed in His Blessed Son, but upon self. No

Christians may safely deem themselves free from the pervading infection of the Pharisee's spirit. We may sink into it if we think with satisfaction upon our attendance at Church services, on our reception of the Holy Sacrament, on kind acts done to the poor, on work in Sunday Schools, or for benevolent societies, or for Christian missions, or for anything else that brings us credit with our fellow-Christians. We do not suspect it, if we pride ourselves on our rejection and distrust of all outward forms, on our indifference to the means of grace, on what we may deem to be the especial spirituality of religion, on our rejection of what is traditional in usage or belief. The essence of Pharisaism is not satisfaction in this or that particular feature of our religious state or practice, but in any part of it whatever. We may be just as thorough Pharisees in dwelling on the pure spirituality of our worship, when contrasted with the fancied formalists or externalists around us, as in dwelling on our care for reverence and order in contrast to the irreverence of others; on our practical benevolence in contrast to their apparent insensibility to the claims of the suffering and the poor. The subtle destructive taint may insinuate itself everywhere. It may lurk beneath the robes of some great prelate as he pontificates in his cathedral, but also in the Quaker-meeting from which all forms are consistently excluded. It may be the bane of a layman's religion no less than of a clergyman's. It may flourish north of the Tweed as well as south of it; on this side of St. George's Channel as well as on the other. It may infest churches too sure, whether of their catholic lineage or of their Scriptural purity, to suspect the extent of their real shortcoming; it may waylay and ruin individual souls who are even eagerly adjuring it, and in the very process of doing so. None of us can deem himself proof against its approaches; and surely no precautions will be thought unnecessary which may help to keep it at bay.

Let me, then, offer one practical suggestion. When you find yourselves beginning to take a Pharisaical pleasure in contemplating this or that part of your religious life, your prayers, your emotions, your good works, your experiences, your influence on others, your familiarity with religious ideas and literature, your command of religious language, or any-

thing else of the sort, try, oh! try, to remember any one passage in your past lives of which even now you can scarcely think without keen distress, even anguish, and which you would not have known to those who respect and love you for all you possess. Some such passage there is in most lives, and you may turn the bitter and humiliating memory to good account if you summon it up from oblivion to scare away from your soul the hideous spectre of Pharisaism. One there is who searches the very heart and veins, who knows it all, and while you remember that His eye is upon you, in its awful omniscience, in its winning tenderness, you will not have the heart to be a Pharisee. Of this let us be sure, that our Lord's sentence on the prayer of the Pharisee in the parable holds good for all time. We shall not, we cannot, be accepted, if we come into the sacred Presence well satisfied with ourselves, thinking meanly of others. It is for ever true, as Mary sings with us each evening of the year in her *Magnificat*, it is for ever true that "God hath filled the hungry with good things, but the rich He hath sent empty away." Without a deep dissatisfaction with self, neither true prayer, nor true praise, nor true thanksgiving are possible for sinners such as we are, because these things are only possible when we are consciously uniting ourselves with Christ our Lord, and leaning on His prevailing merits and intercession. And our deep and constant need of Him can never be understood while the Pharisee temper has hold on us. "Because thou sayest I am rich and have gotten riches, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked, I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire that thou mayest be rich, and white raiment that thou mayest be clothed and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear, and to anoint thine eyes with eye-salve that thou mayest see." It is that we may dissociate ourselves from the Pharisee, that we may place ourselves side by side with the publican, that at the beginning of each morning and evening service the Church leads us to confess "that we have erred and strayed from God's ways like lost sheep, that we have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts, that we have offended against His holy laws, that we have done those things which we ought not to have done, that

we have left undone those things which we ought to have done." And even "that there is no health in us." Our ability to use this language quite sincerely is a fair test of the vital question whether we have any such true knowledge of self as comes from a true sight of the all-holy God, whether we are satisfied or out of heart with self, whether we have more in common with the Pharisee or with the publican.

May our Lord, of His infinite mercy, inflict on us any pain or humiliation we may need in order to attain to that true self-distrust which welcomes His pardoning love; and then, when we are sure of our true need, of our indebtedness to Him, then may He create in us a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within us, and give us the comfort of His help again, and establish us with His princely spirit.

MICAIAH.*

"And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we might inquire of him? And the King of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat,

"There is yet one man, Micaiah, the son of Imlah, by whom we may inquire of the Lord; but I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil."—1 KINGS xxii. 7, 8.

THE first lesson of the morning's service for to-day brings us to the close of an unhappy life—that of Ahab, king of Israel. It is remarkable that in the last scenes we find him intimately associated with Jehoshaphat, one of the most religious of the descendants of David. Probably the growing power of Syria led these kings to feel the political necessity of an alliance for defensive purposes, and this feeling took a practical shape, so unfortunate for the future of the kingdom of Judah, when Jehoshaphat's eldest son, Jehoram, was married to Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab. It was apparently the recent domestic tie between the families that led Jehoshaphat to pay Ahab a friendly visit in his capital, Samaria; and during this visit a question was raised which led to the military expedition in which Ahab lost his life. It

* Preached in St. Paul's Cathedral on Sunday afternoon, August 28th, 1887.

seems that in the lifetime of Ahab's father, Omri, the Syrian king, had taken from Israel the important stronghold of Ramoth-Gilead beyond the Jordan, and, although Ahab had since imposed a treaty on Ben-hadad, the son of the conqueror of Ramoth-Gilead, under the terms of which that stronghold was to be restored to Israel, no such restoration had ever taken place, and the Syrians still occupied it in force. And thus it came to pass that, one day during Jehoshaphat's visit, "the king of Israel said unto his servants: Know ye that Ramoth in Gilead is ours, and we be still and take it not out of the hand of the king of Syria?" It may have occurred to Ahab's advisers that Israel alone was not a match for the growing power of Damascus, and this led Ahab to ask Jehoshaphat whether he would join in an expedition for the capture of Ramoth-Gilead. Jehoshaphat readily consented, but, with his wonted piety, he begged Ahab that, before anything was definitely resolved on, the will of the Lord should, in some way, be ascertained. This King Ahab proposed to do by consulting four hundred prophets who were connected with the worship of Jehovah under the symbol of the golden calves at Bethel and Dan, and the prophets thus consulted unanimously advised the expedition. It would, they said confidently, be successful. Jehoshaphat was still dissatisfied. These prophets were not true prophets of the Lord. They had even avoided—our translation does not make this quite clear—they had avoided mentioning the covenant name, "Jehovah." They were in separation from the old religion of Israel. Jehoshaphat naturally wished to know what a prophet would say who was loyal to the legitimate worship of God at Jerusalem, and Jehoshaphat said, "Is there not here a prophet of the Lord besides, that we may inquire of him?" And then Ahab gave the significant answer, "There is here one man, Micaiah, the son of Imlah:" but he added, "I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil."

Ahab probably thought of the recapture of Ramoth-Gilead as a duty which he owed to his subjects and to his office. He was, as a public man, by no means deficient in activity, and he was anxious to promote the interests and extend the credit of his realm, as he understood them. This is observed in his public works. His buildings in Samaria and other

cities were very considerable undertakings. Putting religious considerations aside, in obedience to military ones, he rebuilt and fortified Jericho. The house of the ancient monarch was never regarded as a private edifice. The public relished and rejoiced in the state and magnificence which surrounded their rulers. They regarded it as in some sense their own. Ahab's palace and grounds at Jezreel, so placed as to enable him to look across his kingdom from Carmel and the Mediterranean on the west, to the hills of Gilead on the east, were renowned for their beauty, and his subjects probably did not think the worse of him for constructing the curious and costly ivory house, which showed that he knew how to promote the fine arts, as they were then understood. Ahab, too, was an experienced soldier, and he may have wished to bequeath to his son the full territory over which his father Micaiah had once reigned. No doubt the Syrians were powerful people, but in two wars against them Ahab triumphed. In the one he had utterly routed Ben-hadad, who was besieging Samaria, by a sudden sally from the walls. The great king was banqueting in his tent with thirty-two vassal monarchs and fled for his life to Damascus. In the second encounter Ahab's victory was still more complete. Ben-hadad was himself taken prisoner, and was only released on condition of restoring all the cities of Israel—Ramoth-Gilead among the rest—which the Syrians had taken, and allowing a factory of Hebrew traders to settle in Damascus. Ahab then might naturally hope to succeed in a third and yet more decisive war, and he held himself to be within his rights in attempting to recover Ramoth-Gilead. Did not Ramoth-Gilead belong to Israel by the two-fold title of original purpose and recent restoration by treaty? Were not the Syrians violating their own engagements, as well as the sacred territory, in keeping possession of it? Was not Ahab doing his simple duty as king of Israel in endeavouring to recover it? This was how the matter may have presented itself to Ahab.

Men of the world make up their minds as to what they mean to do on grounds independent of religion, but they are not sorry to be able to produce plausible moral and religious reasons for their course of action. For the true and adequate consideration of the question Ahab had neither heart nor

inclination. Granted that the restoration of these ancient limits to the territory of Israel was a kingly duty, it was also, viewed religiously, a high privilege. The privilege of high service is not, in the Divine judgment, always and everywhere open to everybody. It does not follow that when some public work has to be done for God, or for His Church, the man who is by office the natural man to do it is morally and religiously well fitted to do it. The Promised Land had to be conquered, but the great leader who had brought Israel through the wilderness to the banks of the Jordan was not permitted, for religious reasons, to cross it; the temple had to be built, but even David might not build it, because he was a man who had shed much blood; and if the integrity of the kingdom of Israel was to be restored, it must be restored by other hands than those of a king whose weak character, not devoid of some amiable characteristics, but entirely controlled by his unscrupulous and depraved wife, had led him into so much violent wickedness. Ahab was under the solemn ban pronounced by Elijah for the murder of Naboth, and, although this had not prevented him from succeeding in defensive warfare, it might forbid success when he was taking the offensive, when he was not fighting for freedom and life, but for the restoration of its ancient glories to the kingdom of Israel, its ancient limits to the Land of Promise. A religious view of the matter like this would have been treated by Ahab, we may be sure, with great impatience. Until a man has learned to look at life from a higher point of view, he cannot understand why he should be religiously disqualified for anything that he chooses to attempt. Religion, he probably thinks, like fire, is a good servant but a bad master; a useful sanction for enterprises which are resolved on independently, but an intolerable intruder if it presumes to interfere with or to condemn them.

For Ahab, religion was very satisfactorily represented by the four hundred prophets who were under the leadership of that impetuous yet pliant courtier, Zedekiah, son of Chenaanah. These four hundred prophets would of themselves have no prepossession for or against going up to Ramoth-Gilead. They might be depended on to say just what Ahab wished. Their connection with the worship of Bethel and Dan involved

their devotion to the interests of the court of Israel. Their facile obsequiousness threw out into sharper and more unwelcome relief the fearless independence of Micaiah, the son of Imlah. It helps us to explain the hatred with which Ahab regarded him.

And here we may stop in order to observe that, deeply interesting as are the political and historical bearings of the narrative before us, they are not by any means its highest interest. It is most interesting as showing on the one hand how courageously the cause of truth and duty may be defended in very difficult circumstances, and on the other how piteously the human will may vacillate and quiver when confronted by what, at least, it suspects to be truth, if, indeed, it do not deliberately prefer what is agreeable to what is true, to its own utter confusion. We have here, I say, an admirable lesson on the consistent intrepidity with which truth and duty may be insisted on in different circumstances. Let us fix our attention on the figure, the great figure, Micaiah, the son of Imlah. He is not one of the prophets who are prominent in the sacred history. He has left no writings tha we know of, and, as a man, he is entirely overshadowed by his great contemporary Elijah. But Micaiah belonged to that sacred line of fearless witnesses of God who knew how to respect earthly greatness, yet for whom earthly greatness has neither charms nor terrors; men who appear in royal courts but to speak in the name of the King of kings. Such was Moses before Pharaoh, crying, "Let my people go;" such was Nathan before David, proclaiming, "Thou art the man;" such was Elijah before Ahab, telling him, "It is thou that troublest Israel, and thy father's house;" such was Daniel before Nebuchadnezzar; such was Nehemiah before Artaxerxes; and, greatest of them all, such was John the Baptist before Herod Antipas, with his simple, fearless message, "It is not lawful for thee to have thy brother's wife." To this line of chosen souls—the very chivalry of the saints—belonged Micaiah—incapable of any gratuitous disrespect to an earthly ruler, but still more incapable of winning a king's favour or of disarming his wrath by saying what was not true. The work of Micaiah's reign was to maintain before a systematically apostate Israel the claims of revelation which had its centre and seat in Jerusalem. Micaiah

could not often say what was agreeable to Ahab without being false to his own deepest religious convictions, and he had no doubt already had interviews with Ahab not recorded in Holy Scripture, such as that which Josephus mentions after the defeat of Ben-hadad, which had impressed Ahab with a vivid sense of the prophet's uncompromising and fearless character. So Ahab knew instinctively what Micaiah would say on the matter in hand. A religious creed has its laws and its obligations, which can often be anticipated pretty accurately even by those who do not share it. Ahab, in his secret soul, knew well enough that in Micaiah's, as in Elijah's, case opposition to himself was in no sense the fruit of personal antagonism or prejudice, and these prophets, whether they were denouncing idolatry or rebuking injustice, or advising or dissuading from, a line of public conduct, were simply obeying convictions with which they dared not trifle. But Ahab, in this, perhaps, resembling the first Napoleon, tried to persuade others, and in the end to persuade himself, that whatever was said or done, in opposition to his wishes, was done or said from a low motive of personal spite. "I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning *me*, but evil." So Ahab was not wrong in anticipating an adverse answer from Micaiah : but, as Jehoshaphat was not satisfied with the four hundred, and as Ahab himself may have had misgivings which helped to counterbalance his wish to listen only to what was in keeping with his purpose, an eunuch was sent to fetch Micaiah.

And then there followed a scene which must long have dwelt in the memory of all who witnessed it. In the gate of Samaria, probably that northern gate which opened on the road to Jezreel, and which consequently overlooked the scene of Ben-hadad's first discomfiture, the kings of Israel and Judah sat, both of them on their portable thrones, while all the prophets prophesied before them. There were the four hundred prophets of the golden calves, and at their head Zedekiah, son of Chenaanah, who now appeared with horns of iron as the prophetic symbol of the power that should conquer the Syrian enemy. "With these," he said, "thou shalt push the Syrians until thou hast consumed them." The four hundred followed the lead of Zedekiah. Ahab, they

shouted, might go up to Ramoth-Gilead, "for Jehovah"—now the sacred name is pronounced by them, probably because they knew that Micaiah had been sent for—"Jehovah will deliver it unto the king's hand." The eunuch who went to fetch Micaiah entreated him not to break the harmony of the proceedings by prophesying in any other sense than that of the four hundred, but the prophet answered, as Balaam even could answer centuries before, that he must speak as he is bidden from heaven. On Micaiah's appearance, Ahab inquired whether he advised the proposed expedition. "Go and prosper," replied Micaiah, "for the Lord shall deliver it into the hands of the king." Micaiah's reply must have convinced Ahab that the prophet's real meaning was something very different from that of his words; that he was only repeating in an ironical way the shouted plaudits of the four hundred: and Ahab therefore again desires him to tell him nothing but that which is true in the name of the Lord. And then Micaiah uttered his solemn forecast with dread solemnity. He drew in a few touches a picture of the moral of the coming defeat. "I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills as sheep that have not a shepherd, and the Lord said, These have no master, let them return every man to his house in peace." And then, feeling that he must justify his own dissent from Zedekiah and the four hundred, he proceeded to narrate a vision which showed how and why they had been deceived. They were the dupes, he said, of an evil agency permitted to lead Ahab onwards to his ruin. Such bold language could not be forgiven. The king of Israel said, "Take Micaiah, and carry him back unto Amon, the governor of the city, and to Joah, the king's son, and say, Thus saith the king, put this fellow in the prison and feed him with bread of affliction and with water of affliction, until I come in peace."

Now, observe the great courage and dignity of Micaiah's bearing before Ahab. Poor, unconspicuous, unbefriended, he stands out as the solitary witness to unwelcome truth before a contemptuous court and an angry king. Even the pious Jehoshaphat does not interfere in his favour, and is not governed by his advice. Micaiah speaks to no purpose, his advice is forgotten, except that he is punished for giving it,

He might seem to have no place in a scene where servility and passion carry all before them. He had to witness the insolent triumph of Zedekiah, the son of Chenaanah, as he was himself hurried off to the dungeon beneath the royal palace in Samaria.

It is, my brethren, comparatively easy to bear witness to truth when a large public sympathises with you, "when," as St. Paul puts it, "the offence of the cross has ceased;" but to be a Micaiah, to encounter nothing but a wall of impenetrable prejudice, to speak with the knowledge that the most unworthy motives will surely be attributed to you for saying what you say, to speak as to the winds without any visible influence on the conduct of other men or on the course of events, and to take the consequences—failure and suffering—with all the dignity of resignation to the Divine will—this is a great grace, and Micaiah ranks, we may be sure, high among the ancient servants of God. And in all ages of Christendom and in all ranks of life Micaiah is again and again needed, and he has his successors. The simple courage which refuses to acquiesce in what is wrong, or to say that wrong is right only because wrong is powerfully recommended, is never wholly wanting. In many a public school, in many a family, in many an office of business, in mess-rooms, in Boards and Committees, in Parliaments and Cabinets, ay, and Church gatherings, there are from time to time cries for some fantastic expedition to Ramoth-Gilead, for some course of conduct which gratifies social ambition or the instinct of mischief, or which is likely to satisfy the love of wealth, or which is demanded by wounded self-love, or by some personal animosity, something that falls in with the ruling prejudices or enthusiasms of the hour, but which is in itself wrong; and the school boy who will not join in some organised mischief or rebellion, the member of the family who will not sanction a dishonourable but advantageous contract, the clerk or the young officer who raises his voice against profligacy, the committee-man or the minister of the Crown who will resign his place rather than violate his higher sense of duty, the bishop or the churchman who puts truth and justice before the voice of some uninformed majority —these in their various ways are Micaiahs. To be ranked with the many is a blessing, if it may be had, but to be ranked

alone may be a higher distinction "among the faithless, faithful only he."

But this history also illustrates the inconsistency—the astonishing inconsistency—and vacillation of which the human soul may be guilty in dealing with recognised or suspected truth, truth which it will not frankly accept, yet which it dares not finally reject. The trial of royalty in all ages is its isolation. Few courtiers will risk their place by offering advice which, however sound, is known to be unwelcome, and the king sees his ideas and wishes reflected in, not corrected by, the minds of those around him. The isolation of the throne and the immense moral disadvantage which it consequently entails on its occupant is one reason among others for joining earnestly in those prayers for the sovereign which have always been a conspicuous feature of the services of the Church of Christ. But crowned Ahabs are not by any means the only people who are liable to this practically moral isolation. It may befall any one in a position of influence or command, trusted leaders of opinion, bishops, employers of labour. Any of us may be thus isolated as we get on in life and become heads of families with children, servants, looking up to us, depending upon us, but never venturing to offer us sincere advice. Exactly in the degree in which time and circumstances force us into a position of this kind should we welcome the advice of any Micaiah who will not shout with all the rest, "Go up to Ramoth-Gilead." The aged Eli could even listen to the voice of the child Samuel, though it was telling of his own humiliation and punishment, and Ahab might have learned from Micaiah enough to have saved him from the bloody death on which he was rushing.

And, indeed, Ahab may seem to have been, to a certain extent, alive to the danger of his position. He could not altogether escape from a desire to know the real truth, or from its fascinating impression and force, while yet he was angry with it and treated it as though it had a sort of grudge against himself; and, while partly deferring to it, ended by defying it, and perishing accordingly. It would seem that Ahab could not divest himself of the belief that Micaiah's advice was better worth listening to. That he admitted in words. Had Micaiah been in Ahab's real judgment a man whose utterances were

only dictated by some vulgar personal animosity against himself, Ahab would not have cared to listen to his advice. He would have overruled the desire of Jehoshaphat that such a person should be consulted in a matter so seriously affecting the well-being of their kingdoms and their personal safety, or else, having summoned Micaiah as a matter of courtesy, he would have dismissed him as soon as possible on the ground that, say what he might, his advice would be really worthless. But during the interview Ahab's anxiety to get at Micaiah's real mind is very remarkable. Micaiah, taking Ahab at his word as a monarch who liked to have agreeable things said to him, whether they were true or not, mockingly repeated the chant of the four hundred, "Go up to Ramoth-Gilead and prosper, for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king;" and if Ahab had not believed in Micaiah's authority, he would not have cared to hear him further. But he does insist with great earnestness that he should tell him nothing but what was true in the name of the Lord. And, once more, when Micaiah had told Ahab the full and bitter truth, and Ahab had defied it by imprisoning Micaiah for telling it, and by engaging in the expedition against Ramoth-Gilead, which it forbade, what showed that he could not treat Micaiah's words simply as falsehood was this: Why did Ahab disguise himself when he went into the battle? To do so was inconsistent with usage; inconsistent with his personal dignity as king and leader of his people; inconsistent with the safety of his ally and connection, Jehoshaphat, whose person was thereby exposed to much greater danger; inconsistent to the discipline of his army and the best interests of the very enterprise which he had at heart. But, for all that, Ahab could not help it. Micaiah's picture of Israel, as sheep without a shepherd, haunted him. At any rate he would try to avoid his predicted fate by not offering himself as a target for the Syrian archers. He could not indeed take precautions against that bow drawn at a venture which smote the king of Israel between the joints of his harness, but he showed in his desire how little he was able to rid himself altogether of the empire of the truth which yet he disobeyed. He professed, you see, to believe the prophet's message to be dictated by personal animosity against himself, and yet he will listen to him. He sees that the prophet has

not given his real mind. He is most anxious to extract it. He insults and imprisons the prophet and disobeys the substance of his message, and yet he acts in his last moments as though he suspected, after all, that the message might be true. Nothing can well be more irrational, and yet—must we not add?—nothing can be truer to the permanent instincts of human nature when under Ahab's circumstances. We need not go far to find parallels for these passionate protestations of rejections of the claims of the Christian creed coupled with an evidently sincere anxiety to know exactly what it does and does not teach, and sometimes with actions and a course of conduct which show that its claims are not altogether set aside as worthless; or even that, as the end of the life draws near, it is deemed prudent to act as though, after all, it might be true, extorting homage from the most reluctant wills, impressing hesitations on the fiercest opponents, winning victories where they would least be anticipated, like its Author and its adorable Subject, being Ruler even in the midst among its enemies.

And, once more, we have here an exhibition of the disposition so deeply rooted in the human mind to seek in religion not what is true so much as what is agreeable. And Ahab said, "I hate Micaiah, for he does not prophesy what is *true* concerning me," that, however mistaken, would have been intelligible; but Ahab does say, "I hate him, for he doth not prophesy *good* concerning me, but evil." What if the evil were, as we know it was, the plain truth? Ahab may remind us of the conduct of people of whom we may very probably have heard, who, having come organic disease in their constitutions, and shrewdly suspecting that they have it, send for a first-class physician, and when he gently, but clearly, admits to them that their suspicions are only too well grounded, become violently angry with him, and when he adds that their only chance of delaying their fate lies in adopting a certain diet and rule of life, do, in fact, adopt it, and yet dismiss the physician who has prescribed it. Certainly Eastern despots have no monopoly of an irrational temper of this description. Democracies may be just as irrational as despots, human nature in a multitude of human beings being on the average precisely what it is in a single man. History shows that Greek Republics could be as cruel and unreasonable as tyrants. It was not

Pilate, but the multitude, that cried, "Crucify Him." It was a Christian Church of which an Apostle had to ask, "Am I therefore become thine enemy because I tell you the truth?" Ahab did not hesitate to say that he hated the prophetic message, not because it was untrue, but because it bore hardly on himself. Many an objector to Christianity in our day, if he said out what he really thinks, would say, "I disbelieve Christianity, because, if it is true, it does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil; it makes such serious demands, it sets up so high a standard, it implies that so much I say and do is a great mistake, that I must away with it. I cannot do and be what it enjoins without doing violence to my inclinations, to my fixed habits of life and thought." Thus, before his conversion, was the case with the great Augustin, that servant of Christ whose name, as you will have remarked, occurs in the calendar of our Prayer-Book for this very day. Augustin tells us in his *Confessions* how completely he was enchained by his passions, and how, after he had become intellectually satisfied of the truth of the creed of the Christian Church, he was held back from conversion by the fear that he would have to give up so much to which he was attached. In the end, we know, through God's grace he broke his chains— those chains which held poor Ahab captive. In such cases lasting self-deceit is only too easy. Men treat what is really only a warp of the will as if it were a difficulty of the understanding, while the real agent—ought I not to say the real culprit?—is almost always the will. The will sees revelation advancing to claim the allegiance of the will, it sees that to admit this claim will oblige it to forego much, and to do much that is unwelcome to flesh and blood, and so it makes an effort to clog or to hinder the direct action of the understanding. Its public language is, "I cannot except religion because it makes this or that assertion, which to my mind is open to historical or philosophical or moral objections of a decisive character;" but, if it saw deeper into itself, it would say, "I dislike this creed, for it doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil, while I continue to live as I do."

And is not this devotion to the agreeable at the cost of the true to be found amongst Christians also? Are there not aspects of revealed truth, portions of revealed truth, which some

of us shrink from or dislike because they condemn us as we are, and warn us that we must be something else before we die, if we are indeed true. Have we never heard of certain chapters in the Bible being never read even by believers of the Bible, *professedly* because they are thought difficult to reconcile with other chapters which are assumed to contain the essence of the Gospel, *really* because they put before us those sterner or more lawful sides of truth which that which is lowest in our characters would have us forget? It is not contended that these portions of Scripture rest on defective evidence of their genuineness. They rest, not on their truth, but on their acceptableness. They are avoided, because they do not to certain readers prophesy good concerning them, but evil. And Christianity, Christian doctrines are rejected, not on account of insufficient warrant, but because they are unwelcome to flesh and blood. They bring the unseen world so very much nearer, they imply a very much higher standard of duty than we are willing to attempt. Who does not see how easily this might happen, as in at least two cases it has happened in respect of the atonement, that overwhelming manifestation of the love of God in the Divine Redeemer, which, if it be sincerely believed, cannot but demand the complete self-surrender of the redeemed; or, again, the great and awful doctrines of grace or of the sacraments, which are the ordinary channels of grace, which throw over life so entirely a new aspect, which must mean, which must compel, so much in practice, if they are believed at all; or revelations of the world beyond the grave, the revealed destiny of the saved, the revealed destiny of the lost—who does not see how easily we may turn away from these, because for the moment we have only too many reasons for doing so?

May God, in His mercy, give us minds open to all the range of His blessed truth and all goodwill to obey it, and to act on it, whatever it may be, that so, by His holy inspiration, we may think those things that be good, and by His merciful guidance may perform the same.

Sermons

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STEWARDSHIP.*

"Give an account of thy stewardship."—LUKE xvi. 2.

It would be somewhat out of place to-day to discuss at any length the parable in which these familiar and awful words occur, for the parable presents itself to us in the yearly course of the teaching of the Church, as the Gospel for the ninth Sunday after Trinity; but the particular words in which the bad steward is summoned to give his account have a meaning and force of their own, a meaning which is independent of the particular lesson which the parable, as a whole, is intended to teach. "Give an account of thy stewardship." The words fall into line with the great truths and solemn thoughts which Advent brings and should keep before us, and we will try to consider them in this strictly practical sense this afternoon.

Now, the point on which we have first of all to fix our minds is the exact idea which the word "steward" is intended to convey. A steward, all the world over, and at all times, is a man who administers a property which is not his own. This, we may be very sure, was the occupation of Eliezer of Damascus, the oldest steward known to history, the steward of the house of Abraham. Eliezer brought with him, as it

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would seem, from the ancient Syrian city, the experience and knowledge which enabled him to preserve and to augment the flocks and herds and movable utensils of the wandering patriarch. But Eliezer had no sort of joint proprietorship in the possessions of Abraham. He was probably a slave, or at any rate he was an unpaid servant who found his reward in the supply of his own daily needs which was thus secured to him, and still more in the trust reposed in him by his master, and the frequent and intimate intercourse which it implied. And so it has been with stewards ever since, down to our own day. The steward's relation to a property is distinguished, on the one hand, from that of those who have nothing to do with the property—because the steward has everything to do with it that he can do for its advantage—and, on the other, from that of the owner of the property, because the steward is in no sense the owner of it, but only the administrator. His duty towards it is dependent on the will of another, and it may terminate at any moment. You remember how, in *Richard III.*, Shakespeare marks the difference, as it was anciently understood, between the king of England and any who acted for or under him:

> Take on you the charge
> And kingly government of this your land:
> Not as protector, steward, substitute,
> Or lowly factor for another's gain.

And as, with the progress of years, the nature of property has become inevitably more complex than it was in simple times, the duty of taking care of it has been more and more largely delegated by its real owners to others who represent them; and great estates and great commercial companies—indeed, every considerable accumulation of wealth is almost as a matter of course committed to the care of some person or persons, who in fact are stewards. The steward, whatever he may be called, is at least as familiar a personage in the modern as he ever was in the ancient world.

Now, what is the central idea of such an office as a steward's? It is, before all things, a trust. It represents in human affairs a venture which the owner of a property makes upon the strength of his estimate of the character of the man to whom he delegates the care of the property. It is an assumption. It may be a warranted, it may be a precarious or an unsound, presumption that the risk is a justifiable one, and that a generous confidence will not be abused. We know how fully this confidence was justified in the case of the ancient steward to whom reference has been already made. The difficult and delicate mission to Padan-aram in quest of a wife for Isaac among the kinsfolk of Abraham was carried out by Eliezer with a loyal faithfulness which contributes one of its most beautiful episodes to the Book of Genesis. We know how it was abused by the steward in the parable, who may not have been a wholly imaginary person, but an actual administrator of an estate in ancient Palestine; and we have not, alas! to tax our memories very greatly in order to recall examples of a great abuse of a great trust resulting in the misery and ruin of hundreds of persons who have placed their little property in the keeping of some one who had no sense of the sacredness of the obligations of his position. Of this let us be sure—that, as no greater honour, because no more practical proof of good opinion, can be done by one man to another than is done when trust or confidence is practically reposed in him, so no greater wrong can be done, nothing more calculated to destroy all good understanding, or, indeed, all permanent social relations, between man and man than a breach of trust. To repose trust in another is an act of generosity, and to betray that trust when so reposed is an act of baseness proportioned to the nature and the greatness of the trust reposed. This is the first idea attaching to the steward's office—it is a trust.

And a second is that, for its discharge, an account must at some time be rendered to some one. This accountability of

the steward to some one lies in the nature of things. A steward with no account of his work to render is, morally as well as socially, an inconceivable personage. The liability to give an account can only be avoided when nothing has been received from another, and when, consequently, there is no basis of trust. Strictly speaking, one Being alone, He from Whom all else proceeds, He Who owes nothing to anybody besides Himself, is not liable to give an account of his administration. The lower being, who merely takes oversight of, and does what he can with, that which is not originally and properly his own, must, at some time or other, in some way or other, to some one or other, give an account. Upon no subject is the verdict of the conscience of man, when moderately healthy, more unvarying, more peremptory, in its judgment than this, that every office of the nature of a trust must be ultimately accounted for. The human conscience, or human elementary sense of justice, had not to wait for the Gospel to know that every steward, sooner or later, must give an account of his stewardship.

But then, if an account is to be given, it must be given to somebody. It cannot be given to a product of the imagination, to an abstract idea, to an unborn posterity. In this metropolis of business there is no need to insist on so obvious a truth. Every account that is kept for others must be audited by somebody. Every trustee is liable to answer for mismanagement of his trust in a court of law. Is it otherwise, think you, in the moral, the spiritual world? "We are accountable," somebody suggests, "to public opinion;" but then public opinion is guided by a very variable standard of duty, and as regards the actions, the private actions, and, still more, the motives of men, it sees, can see, a very little way. "We are accountable," then, it is suggested, "to our own consciences." Yes, but what if our consciences are corrupt judges? What if the conscience has been bribed by the passions? What if it has been silenced by the rebellious

will? If our accountability, as human beings, for our thoughts, words, and acts, in the various relations of life, is to be something more real than a phrase of literature, there must be a Judge, Who knows too much of us to make a mistake about our characters, Who is too just when He tries us to do anything but right. Perhaps the deepest of all differences between man and man is that which divides the man who does in his secret heart believe that he is a steward who has an account to give from the man who does not. With the one man there is an ever-present motive of an almost incalculable power entering into the recesses and the secrets of life. He is constantly asking himself: "How will this look at the Day of Judgment?" "What is the Eternal Judge thinking of it now?" What a view of the destiny of Christians is implied in that one sentence of St. Paul: "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God"! What an estimate of the real condition of the heathen world, lying in its polished ungodliness all around him, escapes in those words of St. Peter: "They shall give an account to Him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead"! What a deep, if unusual, idea of the work of the ministers of Christ is that Apostolic saying: "They watch for your souls as they that must give an account"! Everywhere in the New Testament this belief in man's accountability meets us—not an abstract accountability to some vague, unknown power, but a clear and certain fact that we, each one of us, one day, shall have to account to a living Judge; and when this conviction is wanting how enormous is the difference in the whole range of thought and action! If man has no account to give, no wrong that he does has lasting consequences. If man has no account to give, no wrong that is done to him and that is unpunished by human law can ever be punished. If man has no account to give, life is a hideous chaos; it is a game of chance in which the horrible and the grotesque alternately bury out of sight the very last vestiges of a moral order. If a man has no account

to give, the old Epicurean rule, in all its profound degradation, may have much to say for itself: "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die."

Such then is the office of a steward. He is a trustee, as distinct from the owner; he acts authoritatively, yet only for another. In the property which he administers he has no interest beyond those obligations of duty and of honour which bid him do what he can for it, and his duties are terminable, and he has an account to render.

A human life is a stewardship. We are all of us, in different senses, stewards. None of us is an owner in his own right. None of us is so insignificant that his work will not be noticed; none of us is so highly placed that there is not One higher than he Who will review his work. But life, in its many aspects, is also an almost infinitely varied stewardship. We are stewards, whether as men or as Christians, not less in the order of nature than in the order of grace. The stewardship of which nine men out of ten think, when they honestly admit to themselves that they are stewards at all, is their real or personal estate, the total capital or income, be it great or small, which they happen to possess by a legal title. It may be a fortune which touches upon millions; it may be the scanty and precarious earnings of a shop-boy or a needlewoman. In either case it is a property. It is rightfully and by the operation of Divine providence, placed at, and secured to, the disposal of one human being, and cannot be violently taken from him without violation, I do not say of the enactments of man, but of the moral law of God. Unless property is a real thing, recognised as such by the moral ruler of the world, the Eighth Commandment has no meaning. And this broad truth is not to be set aside because a particular property, or classes of property, may have, morally, if you will, rather than legally, defective titles. If we say that every owner of property is in God's sight a steward of that property we do not deny that his rights in it, as against

those of any other man, are real and absolute rights; only this absolute and real character thus attaching to property, as a right maintained against the claim of other men, does not affect its character when it is placed in the light of the rights of God.

My brethren, what are the causes to which it is due that you or I own any property whatever that we happen to own? It has been left us by will. But what cause or causes brought about the legacy, or made it possible that there should be any legacy at all? It was earned by a father or a grandfather, and has come to us by natural inheritance. Here, again, our parents are not the last terms in an ascending series, and their enterprise and energy were not originally their own. Or, it has been accumulated by ourselves; it is the fruit of the toil of our hands, or of the toil of our brains—the best known title to property. Be it so. But who gave you the hands or the brains with which to earn it? While these titles to property hold good as against all human claims to take it violently from us, they point backwards and upwards to an original Owner of the one universal estate, Who has allowed us, has enabled us, to settle upon it as His tenants. They point to the rights of that Supreme Proprietor, Whose stewards we are; and, therefore, depend upon it, sooner or later, He will say: "Give an account of thy stewardship. What hast thou done with that with which I entrusted thee, but which perhaps thou hast thought of habitually as thine own?" My brethren, let us try to answer that question here and now. Has it, our little all, been spent conscientiously, or as the passion or freak of the moment might suggest? Has the larger part of it been lavished upon self or a fixed proportion at any rate upon others? Has God, His known will, His Church, the support, the extension of His kingdom, had any recognised share whatever in its disposal? Has it gone mainly or altogether in luxuries which pamper the body, and at best do nothing for the mind and the spirit? Has Dives, with us, fared sumptu-

ously every day while Lazarus has lain at our gate filled with sores and desiring to be fed with the crumbs that might have fallen from our table? Has little or nothing been done with it towards redressing those inequalities of condition which are mainly permitted that they may elicit a generosity and self-sacrifice which would be impossible if all had an equal lot?

My brethren, suffer me to use plainness of speech in this matter. You to whom God has given wealth would naturally, would rightly, protect it against theories which are, no doubt, in the last resort as subversive of all social well-being and order as they are certainly at issue with the moral teaching of the Bible. But, if you would do this, you must remember that the responsibilities of property are even more certain than its rights; that those who, legally speaking, do not share it with you may have, morally speaking, in a proportion which your sense of justice should be eager to recognise, a valid claim on your consideration which your conscience may not refuse to entertain. You must remember that the great rule still holds: "If thou art rich, give plenteously; if thou hast little, do thy diligence gladly to give of that little," or else, be sure, there may be some rude summons, even here, to account for the stewardship which you have abused. Property alone becomes insecure when a considerable proportion of it is held by people who think only of themselves. The best insurance against anti-social doctrines which treat property as robbery is such a wise and generous use of it for the glory of God and the good of other men as Christian justice would always have prescribed.

Or the estate of which we are stewards is a more interesting and precious one than this: it is situated in the world of the mind, in the region where knowledge, and speculation, and imagination, and taste have their place and sway. To this fair country men retire for whom mere accumulations of wealth have no charm whatever. Here, at least, they claim to be owners, and to reign; here as artists, as historians, as philoso-

phers, as poets, as men of hard fact, or as men of cultivated fancy, they live as in an earthly paradise in which no supremacy is owned save that of the faculties which have made it the beautiful and fascinating home that it is. And yet in this world of art and literature, no less truly than among houses, and lands, and investments, man is a steward. It is not, whatever he may think, really his; it is not his in the last resort, whatever he may have had to do with creating it. All the industry which has amassed its varied treasures, all the keen intelligence which has sorted out and analysed and arranged them, all the bright imaginations which with almost infinite versatility of resource have played on and around them, even for centuries, all is from another. "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." Whether they have been made the most or the least of, whether they have been devoted to unworthy or to noble ends, whether they have been debased or abused in the using, He is the Author of the gifts which have laid out the world of taste and thought and knowledge; and each contributor to that world, and each student, or even each loiterer in it, is only a steward, the trustee of endowments and of faculties which, however infinitely his own when we distinguish him from other men, are not his own when we look higher and place them in the light of the rights of God.

"Give an account of thy stewardship." The real Author and Owner of the gifts of mind sometimes utters this summons to His stewards before the time of death. He withdraws the mental life of man, but leaves him still with the animal life intact and vigorous. Go to a lunatic asylum—that most pitiable assortment of all the possibilities of human degradation—and mark there, at least among some of the sufferers, those who have abused the stewardship of intelligence. Be it far from us to attempt to unravel in any single instance, still more to proclaim aloud what we may have suspected to be the possible secret of the just judgment of God. We are not

always told by a prophet why some Nebuchadnezzar is driven from the haunts of men; but of those who fill our lunatic asylums some certainly are the victims of profligacy, and there are others who invite a deep compassion since they suffer from inherited disease. But others too there are and have been who in the days of mental strength and buoyancy have forgotten the Author of these powers, have exulted in their consciousness of intellectual might, have used it without regard to the Owner of all or to the true well-being of man, and who have lived to show that the ruin of the very finest mind may be hideous and repulsive in the very ratio of its original strength and beauty when the presiding gift of ordered reason is withdrawn.

Or the estate of which we are stewards is something higher still—it is the creed which we believe, the hopes which we cherish, the religion in which we find our happiness and peace as Christians. With this treasure, which He has withheld from others, God has entrusted us Christians in whatever measure for our own good, but also for the good of our fellow men. All other gifts are little enough in comparison with this. The knowledge of the Author and the End of our existence, the infinite, everlasting God, Father, Son, and Spirit, ever blessed; the knowledge of the Mediator Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, in Whom and with Whom we have real access to God, and through Whose acts and sufferings on our behalf our acceptance with God is secured; the knowledge of what those great words "Life," "Death," "Sin," "Repentance," "Time," "Eternity," really mean; the knowledge which may make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus, this is, indeed, the gift of gifts, "this is life eternal that they may know Thee, the only true God and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent." Of this estate of revealed truth the ministers of Christ are in a special sense stewards. "A bishop," in the Apostle's words, "is to be blameless, as the steward of God;" and men are to account of

the ministers of Christ as also "stewards of the mysteries of God," that is, stewards of the Sacraments, as well as of the once given, and now partially revealed, truths of the Gospel. But also every believing Christian is a steward of the faith which he believes. He has to make the most of it; he has to explore it, to apply it, to make it, as the years go on, increasingly blessed to himself, and to impress it, as his opportunities shall suggest, on the thoughts and the lives of others. It might seem to need no proof that of this treasure of revealed truth we are stewards, and not owners; that it is not ours unconditionally and for ever. Treat it as we may, religion, too, is alone a trust; it is not an inalienable property. There was a well-known personage who used to speak of his religion as he might speak of his family, of his estate, of his seat in Parliament, of his coat-of-arms, as a feature of that whole which constituted his respectability. Be sure that you cannot do that. Religion is, indeed, the very common sense of life, but to treat the knowledge of the Infinite and the Eternal as though it were a decoration of a social position would surely be impossible for any man who had ever got beyond the region of phrases into real and spiritual contact with truth. More common it is to meet with men who treat their faith as though it were a mental toy, who are never tired of discussing its speculative or its controversial bearings, who forget that it relates throughout to a living person, and that it is chiefly to be prized because it enables us to think about Him and so to commune with Him as He is. They who make this mistake may be summoned, before they think, to part with the stewardship which they have thus abused. The loss of faith, which we hear of from time to time, is not always to be explained by the formidable character of any objections which are urged against revealed religion. It may well be the result of forgetfulness that faith is a stewardship, that the faith which is not a practical force in life is already in a fair way to be forfeited, and that the Christian believer, as such, no less than the

possessor of property, or the possessor of mind, has an account to give.

And then, growing out of these three estates, is the estate of influence, that subtle, inevitable effect for good or for ill which every man exerts upon the lives of those around him. That is a property which most assuredly is not to be purchased with money. It escapes those who would try to grasp it; it comes unbidden, undesired, perhaps unwelcomed, to those who dread the responsibility which it entails. But there it is, —a possession of which, whether we will or no, we are in our various degrees stewards; and the question is: What use are we making of it? How is it telling upon friends, acquaintances, servants, correspondents, those who see much of us, those who know us only from a distance? are we helping them upwards or downwards, to heaven or to hell? Surely a momentous question for all of us, since of this stewardship events may summon us, before the end comes, to give an account. We can hardly at this moment dismiss from our thoughts the chief magistrate of a great people, who within the last forty-eight hours has had to resign the reins of government because, with many titles to the respect and good opinion of his countrymen, he has not known how to make a good use of the stewardship of influence.

And the last estate of which we are the stewards is health and life. This bodily frame, so fearfully and wonderfully made of such subtle and delicate texture that the wonder is that it should bear the wear and tear of time, and last as long as for many of us it does,—of this too we are not owners, we are only stewards. It is most assuredly no creation of our own, this body, and He Who gave it us will, in any case, one day withdraw His gift. And yet how many a man thinks in his secret heart that, if he owns nothing else, he does at least own, as its absolute master might own, the fabric of flesh and bones, of nerves and veins in which his animal life resides; that of this at least he may rightfully do whatever he will, even abuse and ruin, and irretrievably degrade and even kill it; that here no question of another's right can possibly occur, that here he is a master on his own ground, and not a steward. Oh! piteous forgetfulness in a man who believes that he has a Creator, and that that Creator has His rights! Oh! piteous

ingratitude in a Christian who should remember that he is not his own but is bought with a price, and that therefore he should glorify God in his body no less than in his spirit, since both are God's! Oh! piteous illusion, the solemn moment for dissipating which is ever hurrying on apace. The Author of health and life has His own time for bidding us give an account of this solemn stewardship, often too when it is least expected. There are inscriptions which may be read upon tombstones in any large cemetery which tell a story which none can misread. And of late all English hearts have turned to one intimately related to our own Royal Family who, with exceptional endowments, as they say, of physical strength and vigour and all that constitutes elevated character, and standing on the highest steps of the most powerful throne in Europe, which at any hour for a long while since he might have been called to fill, is stricken down by that unseen Power whose visitations, however inscrutable, are always loving and always just. In many a poor cottage, amid unnoticed tears, some true and noble, though humble, life has bent low again and again before the same awful summons. But there are sorrows, as there are sins, as there are virtues, which command the attention of the world.

Certainly it is not always in judgment that the voice is uttered, "Give an account of thy stewardship." The solemn summons which God addresses to different men from time to time on this side the grave points on to an account beyond, to a judgment that shall be universal, that shall be final. As St. Paul said at Athens eighteen centuries ago: "God hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man Whom He hath ordained, whereof He hath given assurance unto all men, in that He hath raised Him from the dead." Each earlier summons to every soul to give an account of its stewardship suggests that solemn moment when "the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all His holy angels with Him; and then shall He sit on the throne of His glory, and before Him shall be gathered all the nations, and He shall separate them one from another as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats." And the principle of this separation will be, at bottom, the use or the abuse of the stewardship which each has received. "Then shall the

King say unto them on His right hand: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was an hungered and ye gave Me meat, I was athirst and ye gave Me drink, I was a stranger and ye took Me in, naked and ye clothed Me, sick and in prison and ye visited Me. And then shall the King say unto them on His left hand: Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was an hungered and ye gave Me *no* meat, I was athirst and ye gave Me *no* drink, I was a stranger and ye took Me *not* in, naked and ye clothed Me *not*, sick and in prison and ye visited Me *not*."

May we, by God's grace, lay to heart these solemn warnings of our most merciful Redeemer, remembering that, though in this sphere of sense heaven and earth may pass away, His solemn words will not pass away.

FOREIGN MISSIONS.*

"No man cometh unto the Father but by Me."—JOHN xiv. 6.

PERHAPS in no other of His recorded words does our LORD state more clearly or more imperatively than in these the real nature of His claim upon the attention and the homage of the world. "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." He implies that there is a need, common to all human beings at all times, greater and more urgent than any other need—that of coming to the Father. He, Who has made all men for Himself, has so ordered His work that the powers and faculties of man can only find at once their full exercise and their true harmony when they rest in Him. As the highest Truth, He satisfies the intellect of His creature who amidst its aberrations is constantly seeking the absolutely true; as the highest Beauty, He takes captive the heart, which He has so fashioned that it can find complete expansion and delight in no beauty of form or beauty of mind that is beneath His throne; and as the eternal Rule of Right, whose moral laws are but the expression of His essential nature, He secures to the created will which

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obeys Him, that strength, that directness of purpose, in which its true excellence consists. Apart from Him, the Father of our spirits, human nature is at best a magnificent wreck—keen intelligence, but with a sore and unsatisfied heart, or with a truant and feeble will: warm affections, but with nothing on which the understanding may lastingly rest, or which the will may confidently obey; vigorous purpose, but with no such discernment of an object in which thought and affection can be permanently satisfied as to save it from enterprises which only plunge man deeper into unhappiness and error. And, apart from Christ, man is also, in different degrees of removal, thus and assuredly apart from God, just as in a fair region which has been desolated by an earthquake we may see, side by side with the ruined edifices or the burnt-up soil or the deep fissures, not a few traces of the beauty which had been so cruelly marred. So human nature without Christ, and at its worst, has always had about it traces and relics of an ancient excellence, side by side with proofs of some catastrophe to which it owes its present ruin. That remote but certain event which Christian faith speaks of as the "Fall of Man," is less distinctly proclaimed in the pages of revelation than it is witnessed to by the actual facts of human nature; for in practice men themselves treat their own human nature, not as a thing of ideal excellence, but as some restless and disturbing force, against which man himself, even in his own interests as a member of his own society, must necessarily take precautions of law and of police; and the secret whisper of the human heart echoes the verdict of man's reason in social or political conduct. If there is any one of the masters of the Roman world in whom Englishmen must feel interest, it is the Emperor Septimus Severus, when years after he had been invested with the purple, he passed through London on his way to his Scottish campaign; and, as you will remember, he died at York. Severus ruled the Roman Empire before it had yet seriously entered on its decline, and he had risen to that great eminence from a humble station by a combination of determination, ability, and unscrupulousness, which enabled him to crush his rivals, to gratify all his personal wishes and ambitions, and to secure for his children the succession to the imperial throne. And yet there is a remarkable saying of his

which is worth remembering—"Omnia fui et nihil expedit"—"I have been everything by turns, and nothing is of any good." It is a heathen echo of the experience of the kingly Preacher: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity;" it is a witness to the heart-sickness of man, with all this world can possibly give entirely at his disposal, yet separated from the highest good, separated from the true satisfaction of his being, separated from God.

"No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." How does our Lord effect man's return to the Father? Partly, no doubt, by His teaching, but also, and still more, by His person. He does not merely encourage us to return by proclaiming that God is Love as well as, or rather because He is also, Justice. He says also: "I am the Way," and here we see the force of that remarkable saying that "Christ is Christianity." Buddha is not Buddhism; Buddhism might have been taught though its author had never lived. Mohammed is not Islam. The Koran itself warns us against any such confusion between the teacher of its doctrine and the substance of the doctrine itself. But Christ our Lord Himself is Christianity. His teaching is inextricably bound up with the facts of His person, and it is not merely because He taught what He did, but because He is what He is, that through Him we can come to the Father. His proclamation of Himself would be intolerable if He were not much more than man; but as God and man in one person He spans the abyss which had yawned between earth and heaven. He touches, on the one hand, the awful purity of the everlasting Father, and on the other, though without a share in its defilements and its ruin, the ruined and defiled race which He came to save. And thus does He remove the one cause which created, and which maintains, the separation between man and God by a death which crowned a life perfectly conformed to the Divine will, and invested with a strictly incalculable value from its association with its Divine nature. He made a perfect atonement for human sin which all may claim to share if they will, by union with Himself. And He conquers sin, not only for us, but in us, by those gifts of grace involving a real oneness with Himself, the Conqueror, which His Spirit secures to us even to the end of time. And thus, since He is God as

well as man, we too may come to know, we may be united with that awful and blessed Being in whom alone our weak and distracted nature can recover its strength and its repose.

My brethren, I cannot doubt that many of you who listen to me will confirm, in some measure, what I am saying from the experience of your own souls: "Unto you which believe, He is precious." That sense of union with Him, awe inspiring but unspeakably blessed and incommunicable—what soul that has ever known it can fail to understand how He is for it the true way to the Father? In hours of sorrow, in hours of anxiety, in the desolation of bereavement, perhaps in the prospect of death, it has been by clinging to Him that you have found that strength and peace which has enabled you quietly and confidently to await "the joy that cometh in the morning." And why? Because in union with Him you are already united to the everlasting Father to the satisfaction and the end of your being.

"No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." The saying has a negative as well as a positive aspect, an excluding as well as an asserting force. Not only does Christ reconduct man to the Father, but He alone can do so. He does not say what many a modern teacher would fain make Him say: "Others have led men, others will lead men, out of their errors and degradations back to God, and I can do so too, only somewhat better than they." He does not put forward His religion as the elder or fairer sister among a number of competing creeds no one of which is without some token of Divine authentication. This is what many, if they could, would make Him say, only He, speaking for Himself, does not say it. True it is that in every nation "he that serveth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of Him;" but then this service of God, this working righteousness, is of such a sort that it involves, as in the case of Cornelius, the acceptance of the one Mediator so soon as He is known. "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me." Christ's claim on the world is not merely a relative claim: it is absolute. He dares to monopolise the opening of the road to Heaven. He alone has the secret of man's happiness and greatness in His heart and in His hand. As His word only is infallible, so His blood only has a cleansing power, and His grace only can restore the

ruined nature which He would save. And thus His apostles knew what He meant when they too, after Him, proclaimed: "Neither is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name given under Heaven among men whereby we can be saved."

Now this is the fundamental conviction which justifies and invigorates missionary enterprise. If, when Christians have been free to do their best for their Master's cause, missionary enterprise has at any time slackened or has been abandoned, it has been because the real nature of the claims of Christ has been lost sight of. Missionary enterprise is at once wasteful and impertinent if the Christian religion, instead of being necessary to every child of Adam, is only suited, we will say, to the western world at particular stages of its civilisation; and if all religions are partly true and partly false, and the choice between them is to be settled, not by recognising any universal necessity of man or any decisive proof of a clear mandate from God, but by considering what the genius, as it is called, of a particular people has contented itself with in past or present times, then Christianity has been mistaken in a vital matter and from the very first. The cultivated centres of Greek life had each of them its favourite object of worship surrounded with everything that popular enthusiasm, or the devotion of generations, or the perfection of art, could possibly supply. Ephesus had its world-famed temple of Artemis or Diana, and Athens had been for centuries the city of Pallas Minerva, and Corinth rejoiced in the impure worship of Aphrodite; but St. Paul did not consider these local manifestations of the religious genius of pagan Greece any reason against opening a Christian mission in each one of these centres of elegant or degrading illusion. And if we have not lost part and lot in the spirit of St. Paul, we shall not deem the antiquity and vast empire of Buddhism or the more aggressive and more modern religion of the false prophet Mohammed any reason which should deter us from doing what we may to rescue races, some of them more highly endowed by nature than ourselves, from the tyranny and the darkness of these and other errors. Be the genius of these peoples what it may, we, like St. Paul, are debtors both to the Greeks and the barbarians. We owe them the Gospel. We owe it in some cases to races, no doubt,

with natural qualities finer and more varied than our own; we owe it to their honest strivings after light. We owe it to their unspeakable degradations, but especially do we owe it to that loving and gracious Saviour, Who, without any claim or merit of ours, has called us out of darkness into His marvellous light, and has bidden us go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature.

But here there are objections which, unless I am mistaken, will present themselves to some minds at the present day. If, it will be said, Christianity is so great a blessing, so much greater a blessing than any other to mankind, may it not be trusted to recommend itself without the apparatus and machinery of missions? Man is not slow to understand his true interests in every-day and earthly matters. Railways and telegraphs make their way in all directions without being helped by missionaries devoted to the glory of electricity and steam; and if Christ has really enabled man to attain the great end of his existence by reconciling him to the universal Father, may not men, with an enlightened sense of self-interest, be trusted to find this out and to avail themselves eagerly of so great a privilege? No, brethren, this language, supposing it to be sincere, is not the language of Christian wisdom. There is one point of the greatest importance which marks the difference between the blessing of Christianity and any earthly blessings or advantages whatever. It is that Christianity, if it is to bless us here and hereafter, requires us to conquer and renounce a great deal to which our fallen human nature is admittedly prone. It is not necessary to give up theft, or adultery, or evil speaking, in order to reap the full advantages of railroads, steamships, electricity, and telegraphs. Material progress encounters no obstacles to its extension in the passions of fallen man; and there are false religions too in the world which can flatter and bribe these passions without compromising themselves. The harem of a Mohammedan prince or caliph involves no dishonour or disloyalty to Islam. With Christianity it is otherwise. Christ demands a "putting off of the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts," and a renewal, not merely in outward conduct, but in "the spirit of the mind," and so a "putting on of the new man which after God is created in righteousness," and

with such a demand Christianity makes enemies in fallen human nature. It cannot help making them, and the greatness of the blessings which it offers are therefore not able of themselves to outweigh the prejudice which it inevitably creates. If the herald of Jesus Christ proclaims "Peace on earth, goodwill among men," achieved by the reconciliation of God and man, fallen human nature still mutters in an undertone: "All the same I hate him, for he doth not prophesy good concerning me, but evil." And, therefore, Christianity, though the dispenser of the greatest of all blessings, always has met, and always must meet, with resistance, secret or avowed resistance; and therefore sacrifices of time, and of money, ay! and of life itself, will be necessary if this Divine religion is to be a match for the obstacles which its very excellence creates.

But, secondly, it is urged that mission work, like charity, begins at home. "Look at your great cities," so an anonymous correspondent wrote to me a few days ago, "look at London before you busy yourselves about the needs of distant populations. Consider the hundreds of thousands around your own gates for whom the Unseen has practically no existence, who never enter any place of worship. Consider the drunkenness, the profligacy, the crime of every description, which baffles the efforts of all Christians of every kind. Consider the poverty and distress which cry out to all who bear the Christian name to do something, or, better still, if they can, to prevent it. Look at home at any rate before you look abroad, and earn a right to recommend the blessings of Christianity in distant lands by doing something more for a people which still so greatly needs higher Christian influences and education, though it has been, by profession, Christian for much more than a thousand years." Now, without discussing how far there is, or is not, an element of exaggeration in some current pictures of our social and religious condition in England, it might be pointed out that the first efforts of the great missionary society for which I am pleading this afternoon are directed to the colonies and dependencies of Great Britain, and so are designed to benefit, and do very greatly benefit, that large body politic of which, after all, we here in London and in England, only form a part, though it be the most important part. But I do not dwell on this, because the obligation lying on all Christians to make known

our blessed Master's name is certainly not limited by the frontiers of any empire, ancient or modern. Our Lord did not say to his Apostles, "Go ye into all the provinces of the Roman Empire, and make disciples of all the subjects of the Cæsars." A religion issuing from the mind and heart of the universal Father must be adapted to the needs of every one of His rational creatures; and to say that there are any races, at any stage of their development, for which it is not adapted, or for which it is less adapted than some false creed which would fain supplant it, is to deny by implication that our Lord Jesus Christ is what He claims to be, the Saviour of the world. No, the Gospel is due to, as it is needed by, every single human being. But are those who object to Christian missions, because they would have us address ourselves to Christian duties nearer home, always and entirely sincere? Is it not the case that when the Church takes their advice, and is enabled to restore Christian faith and life in a particular English parish or district, or diocese, to something like a primitive standard of fervour and excellence, that she is apt to be cautioned against thinking too much of any such success, while two-thirds of the human family are not Christians at all? If we ask our critics to help missions to the heathen, they plead their absorbing interest in the condition of our home populations. If we ask them to strengthen the hands of the Bishop of Bedford and the band of devoted clergy and laity who work with him for the physical and social, as well as the spiritual well-being of the people at the East end of London, then they observe that the world is much vaster than London, and that Christianity has yet done nothing for the larger part of it. To such critics we cannot afford to listen. Time flies, and our Master's bidding is plain and imperative. Some of you would remember an occurrence which took during the second Punic war, at the most critical period of the long struggle between Rome and Carthage for the empire of the Western world. It has often been referred to as showing how from early days the Roman people possessed what is called "the instinct of empire." When the victorious Carthaginian general Hannibal was in the heart of Italy and threatening the very existence of Rome, the Senate dispatched a fleet and army to Spain, that they might strike a blow in the rear of the conqueror by laying siege to Saguntum, and their

bold venture, which they could so ill afford at the time, was, as you know, abundantly justified by the result. Now, every heathen land is the Saguntum of the Christian Church, and if it be true that some spiritual Hannibal is ravaging the populations which have long owned her sway, or is even threatening her ruin in this or that of her ancient homes, still she owes the gospel of salvation to all the world, she remembers the Divine instruction: "If they persecute you in one city, flee to another." For she, too, in a nobler sense than Rome, has the instinct of world-wide empire, since she looks forward to a day when "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

And, once more, unless our hearts are really interested in the extension of the kingdom of Christ, we are not much likely to be interested in the average missionary. There are, of course, missionaries and missionaries, and we need not assume that every man who bears the title is all that it should convey. A man who has given the best years of his life to spreading the faith among some heathen people comes back to England. He has been cut off from the main currents of higher English thought; he knows nothing of the recent phases of our politics, except from a stray newspaper which has reached him now and then; nothing of our popular literature; nothing of that varied and singular conglomerate of information and conjecture of knowledge and gossip, of high aspirations and base enterprise, which from week to week and month to month engages popular attention at home, and familiarity with which is a main certificate of popularity. From all this he has been banished. He has put his whole mind and heart into the work of bringing some very degraded human beings to the knowledge and love of their Saviour. Of this work his heart is full, and, when he gets up to speak at a missionary meeting, or when he enters into society, he can talk of this, but not of much else; and too often what is our verdict upon him?—"A good man, no doubt, a very good man, but very dull,"—a verdict which might have been passed upon St. John or St. Paul in certain quarters among us. And this idea of a missionary —as good, but dull—extends itself in too many minds to the whole subject of missions, makes them an unwelcome, if they are an inevitable, subject, chills our hearts, closes our hands

when, if ever, we should be prodigal of sympathy and generosity. Ah! there is a pathetic nobility about a missionary's life which a Christian at least should be able to understand. A young man, in whose mind generous aspirations after work and sacrifice, kindled by the love of the Divine Redeemer, have not yet been chilled out by that cynicism which too often is mistaken for the wisdom of later years, has caught sight of the glory which attaches to the life of a Christian apostle, and has desired to share it, combining something of the enterprise of a discoverer and of the courage of a soldier with the assured conviction of the believing Christian. He devotes his opening manhood to the missionary work of the Church of God, and, on the day of his ordination or of his departure, he is upheld by the sense of a great enthusiasm, an enthusiasm which is shared by the relatives and fellow Christians who crowd around him, sustaining him almost visibly by their sympathy and their prayers. It seems in those bright moments as though nothing could be difficult, as though failure were impossible, as though the convictions and the hopes which glow within his soul and the souls of others must perforce carry all before them; as though, like the walls of Jericho at Joshua's trumpet blast, the old fortresses of heathen error must crumble immediately at the summons of the officers of the army of Christ. This is his youthful enthusiasm, and then there comes the stern reality. He lands in Africa, in India, in China, in Japan. He notes the glance, half pitying, half contemptuous, with which some countryman, who has come out before him to make a fortune, by whatever means, recognises the arrival of a missionary. He knows what that glance means, and sick at heart he turns to the Gentiles. He hopes to find satisfaction in his work among the poor heathen whom he comes to enlighten and to save. But how is he to get at them? He scarcely knows, if he does know, the grammar of their uncouth language, much less its vocabulary; and with this poor and awkward instrument of intercourse, which raises a smile on their faces as he attempts to use it, he hopes to change their most fundamental convictions, and their whole manner of life. The task is not insuperable. It has been achieved, it is being achieved at this moment, by many a devoted worker in the missionary field; but, at least, it is a task of enormous diffi-

culty, and, just as he perchance is beginning to surmount it, the climate, which is hostile to any European constitution, begins to tell upon his, and he is laid low by fever—a fever which may or may not be fatal. There at a distance from the comforts of home, and from the kind words and services of friends and relations, there he lies in the solitude of his hut, perhaps attended by some kindly savage, perhaps unattended by any human hands, but resting on the arm of God. It is not necessary to point to those missionaries who in our own day, as in others, have attained to the very highest distinction by shedding their blood for Christ. It is enough to say that any missionary who is moderately true to the spirit of his vocation belongs to the moral aristocracy of the Church of Christ; he is enrolled in our Lord's own guard of honour; and those of us who have taken the easier path in ministerial or lay Christian life, and have stayed at home, should be the very first to recognise his high distinction.

It is sometimes said that England best does her duty to heathen lands by conferring on them the blessings of civilisation, good laws, equal justice, social order, and all those material improvements in human life which European science and industry have so largely multiplied during the present century. Certainly it is not my duty or inclination to depreciate these great advantages, but, unhappily, our civilisation is accompanied by an alloy of evil which we cannot ignore. We cannot forget what has been often the moral meaning of the sale of some British drug among a pagan population, or of the arrival of a British ship's company at a pagan port, or of the enrichment of a British capitalist or company in a pagan district. There is no need further to lift the veil. All who have looked into this matter must know and must own that England owes to more pagan lands than one, not merely that glorious Gospel which is already the birthright of the world, but also some sort of moral reparation for evil which those who bear her name, and who are protected by her flag, have too often carried with them into pagan lands and homes. And how can this debt of justice be better discharged than by teaching our poor creditors to know and to love the Son of Righteousness; by assuring them that it was not in obedience to His rule and law, but in despite and in defiance of it, that

the wrong was done of which they rightly complain, and that He now offers to them that truth which has conferred on the Western civilisation—which they at once admire and fear—whatever of real strength and excellence there is in it? There are no doubt heathens and Moslems who look wistfully at our European life and manners, and would fain copy and share them, but, if possible, without our faith. Not a fortnight since a distinguished Moslem was reported to have expressed himself in this very sense. "We will have your benevolence, your charity, your justice, and truth, your science of health, your railroads, telegraphs and manufactures; we will have what is good for us, but we will not have your Christian dogma, your Trinity, your divinity of Jesus, and the rest of it." It was as if some Jew of old had said to our Lord: "Heal our sick, cleanse our lepers, raise our dead, cast out the devils that beset us, feed on our hill-sides the four thousand and the five thousand famishing peasants who crowd around Thee, but do not insult our most cherished prejudices by such moral teaching as that of Thy Sermon on the Mount;" as if it were possible for Christians to omit from the Gospel the truth of the Godhead of Jesus in order to make it easier to build an hospital, or to lay down a new railway, we will say, in Persia. Why, it is the truth of the divinity of our Lord which is the very motive power of our interest in the heathen world. It is because He is Divine as well as human, that through Him we have access in one spirit unto the Father. Be silent about this, and what would be the real worth of the philanthropy and the railroads? unless, indeed, this world is really all, and the world beyond the grave a creation of the fancy. Be silent about this, and you may get a certain measure of applause from unbelievers who have no mind for that faith which St. Paul tells us justifies before God, but do not flatter yourselves that you are treading in the steps of St. Paul and St. John. Be silent about this, and your converts—if those whom you could attract would deserve the name,—when they had learnt from you the ways of civilised Europe without the faith of Christendom, might expect to hear the Divine Master repeating an ancient reproach, "Ye seek Me because ye did eat of the loaves."

I ask you, then, my brethren, to give your generous support

this afternoon to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, the oldest association for missionary work in the Church of England. Incorporated under King William III. it has since his days counted among its advocates and supporters almost every single name that has been held in honour in the English Church. With a history that now approaches the completion of its second century, it has necessarily done more than any other body for the expansion of our portion of the Kingdom of Christ; and if of late its claims have been somewhat lost sight of, this is largely because, in things human, all recent enterprise is generally more attractive, if not always more effective, than that which dates its origin from an earlier time. But it is not creditable to us as a Church that this great Society should be straitened in its resources; it is not for the honour of our Saviour that so tried a means of propagating His Gospel should be lost sight of. Think for a moment even of part of what has been achieved. In Australia, New Zealand, Canada, this Society has nurtured twenty-four dioceses until they have become self-supporting; and now Australia and New Zealand are sending missions of their own to Melanesia, and New South Wales is organising also a mission to New Guinea. And it is largely owing to the action of this society that the Church in India is becoming more and more every year what we must earnestly desire it to be, a Church whose pastors and people are natives of India. Out of six hundred and forty clergymen in India two hundred and seventy are born Indians, and next Sunday Bishop Caldwell will ordain twelve natives of India to the Diaconate, as in December of last year he ordained fifteen. Meanwhile, apart from the difficult task of adequately supporting missions for which the society is already responsible, there is the duty of responding to new invitations, the duty of lifting up our eyes and looking on the "fields that are white already unto harvest." Japan is welcoming with increasing cordiality the religion which once she persecuted so bitterly; and Bishop Bickersteth is making ready to resign some portion of his vast charge to an episcopal colleague, while other lands claim our attention with even more pressing importunity. On January 1 in last year the world learnt that Burmah, a territory larger far than that of the United Kingdom, had been annexed to the Empire of the

Queen. But such an annexation surely implies new and vastly increased responsibilities for English Christians, which this society is most anxious, but is as yet from lack of means too little able, to discharge.

It is not often, my brethren, that we ask you to contribute to any cause whatever at the close of the regular Sunday service in St. Paul's. It has been felt that one great object of a Church maintained on such a scale as this is that, as a rule, it should offer to the people of London the opportunities of Christian worship and Christian teaching "without money and without price." If to-day is an exception to this rule, it is because in our judgment there is an exceptional necessity, and you will not, as we hope, be wanting to an effort which must command the sympathy of every man and woman who sincerely believes that through our Lord Jesus Christ alone is there real approach to the Father of spirits.

"BEHOLD, I COME QUICKLY."*

"Behold, I come quickly."—Rev. iii. 11.

These words, which have just been read to us in the Second Lesson, are a part of our Lord's message from heaven to the bishop, or, in St. John's language, the angel of the Church of Philadelphia. It is not improbable that this Bishop was no other than the Demetrius who is mentioned in St. John's Third Epistle as having "a good report of all men and of the truth itself." And, if this is the case, we have before us a holy man, who, probably, was not a very resolute one, and was placed in a position of much difficulty. Great as is the place occupied by the angels of the seven churches in the Bible, they would have appeared to their heathen fellow-citizens very insignificant people, of whom no account at all was to be taken by the elegant and wealthy society that surrounded them. Assisted by one or two presbyters and deacons, a bishop of that apostolic time ministered to and governed a small congregation of Christians gathered out

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of the back streets of those generally splendid cities in which Greek art and life went hand in hand with the luxury and the superstition of Asia. Such a bishop had, as a rule, two kinds of difficulties to contend with. There was a fermentation of thought on the frontiers of the apostolic Church in which Jewish and heathen ingredients were constantly producing one or another form of so-called Agnostic error—one phase of which is described in the Epistle to the Colossians, and another phase in the Epistles to Timothy and Titus; and this was a constant subject of anxiety to those primitive rulers of the Churches of the lesser Asia. And thus the deeds of the Nicolaitanes at Ephesus, the doctrine of Balaam at Pergamos, "the woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess," at Thyatira, were samples of the trouble in question. And at Philadelphia there was what is described as "a synagogue of Satan," the proceedings of which would have been watched by the Bishop with natural misgivings. Besides those dangers from within, there was the constant danger of popular violence or of official persecution from without. Each Jewish synagogue, and still more, each heathen temple, was the centre of a strong anti-Christian fanaticism which might at any moment arouse the passions too violent to be appeased with anything short of bloodshed, and thus at Pergamos Christ's faithful martyr Antipas had already been slain, the pagan vehemence of the population being such that the place is described as the seat or throne of Satan. Philadelphia was a comparatively modern city. But somewhat more than half a century before St. John wrote, it had been almost entirely destroyed by an earthquake; and an impoverished and superstitious population would be likely to see in the Christian Church a legitimate and inviting object of assault. The bishop, Demetrius—if it was he—had hitherto made head against the anxieties around him. Hitherto he had kept the Word, he had not denied the name of Christ, he had the promise which past faithfulness always commands, while, at the same time—since no such promise can suspend man's freedom to rebel or to obey—he is warned of the urgent duty of perseverance: "Because thou hast kept the word of My patience, I will keep thee from the hour of temptation which shall come upon all the world to try them that dwell upon the earth.

Behold, I come quickly: hold thou fast that thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

"Behold, I come quickly." If our Lord's words are understood of His second coming, it is obvious to reflect that the good Bishop of Philadelphia died without witnessing their fulfilment—nay, he has been in his grave for something like eighteen centuries, and our Lord has not yet come to Judgment. The event has shown that the predictions uttered by our Lord at the close of His ministry referred only remotely to His second coming, and immediately to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the generation that heard Him did not pass away until all that referred to that event had been fulfilled. But this saying of our Lord in the vision of St. John, "Behold, I come quickly," cannot have referred to the destruction of Jerusalem; and, yet, if it meant the second Advent, the bishop of Philadelphia did not witness the fulfilment of it, and it is still unfulfilled. Now St. Peter warned Christians not long before his death, that this delay would be used in after times as an argument against Christianity. "There shall come in the last days scoffers walking after their own lusts and saying, Where is the promise of His coming, for since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the Creation?" That this idea of unvarying order maintained uninterruptedly since the creation is not accurate, St. Peter argues by pointing to the Flood, and the Flood was a catastrophe of such a kind as to imply that another catastrophe might, after whatever lapse of time, succeed it. But the scoffers of whom the Apostle was thinking would probably rest rather on the indefinite postponement of Christ's coming, than on any supposed intrinsic impossibility attaching to it. And this is met by St. Peter in another way. What had to be remembered, he would teach us, was that God necessarily looks at time in a very different way from the way in which man looks at it. Man sees only a little distance, and he is impatient because his outlook is so limited. To him it seems that an event will never arrive which has been delayed for some centuries, and so that judgment, long apprehended but also perhaps through a series of ages long delayed, will not really take place at all, but may well at once be classed among the phantoms of a morbid and disordered brain. With God it is

otherwise. Long and short periods of time do not mean to Him what they mean to us. A day seems to us a short period of twenty-four hours, but it may be regarded by the Infinite Mind—for Whom time assuredly is not less capable of infinite divisibility than is matter—as a period of extended duration. "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years," and conversely to us a thousand years, to say the least, is a large period in the history of the world. During such a period some thirty generations of men are born and die, and kingdoms and empires rise and fall, but with the awful Mind that can embrace eternity a thousand years are but as one day.

Let me beg your more particular attention to the point before us. It is not that one day and a thousand years are in themselves the same; it is not that duration of time is not a real thing, but only an illusive impression on the human mind: it is that, when you and I speak of a long or short period of time, these epithets "long" and "short" are only comparative epithets; they mean a comparison of some given period of time with some other which we have before our minds. You and I think that a life of eighty years is a long life, but a man like Methuselah would have thought it a short one—he had a higher standard to judge by. In the same way, we English think five hundred years a considerable period in the duration of an empire, but it would have appeared, to say the least, much less considerable to an ancient Egyptian, who could look back to so great an antiquity for his own country. A period appears to us long only until we compare it with another that is longer, and the longest period of time that the human mind can possibly conceive must seem insignificant when it is compared with eternity. God, Who has subsisted throughout ages, throughout unbroken, unending ages; God, Who is Himself "without beginning of days or end of years;" God, Who does not live in eternity as we live in time, but Who possesses eternity since it is an attribute of His own; God, Who sees as with a present glance what we only think of as an immeasurable past or as an immeasurable future; God must think of that very inconsiderable enclosure within His eternity, which we speak of as "Time," very differently from ourselves. To us ten thousand or twenty thousand years seem a very long period: to Him it may be

little enough by comparison with the standard of eternity—it may be as nothing. And yet in reality it is not nothing. God, Who sees all things as they are, sees that it is twenty thousand years; but then He forms a different estimate of its relative value from our estimate of it, because He has, in His own eternity, a standard of comparison which is not present to us. We see this truth more clearly if we reflect that to us men the passage of time seems slow or rapid, its periods seem long or short, according to our varying moods or tempers. When we are suffering acute pain of body, or very great anxiety of mind, time, as we say, "hangs heavily." We count the minutes, the half minutes, the quarter minutes, the seconds; we seem to extend the duration of time by the suffering which we compress into its constituent moments. And, on the other hand, when we are experiencing great pleasure, whether of mind or body, we become almost or entirely insensible to the flight of time; we pass into a state of consciousness which has apparently no relation to the succession of events. And from this we may understand how the one Being, Who is the fountain of all goodness, because He is in Himself infinitely blessed—blessed in contemplating His own perfections, blessed in surveying the works which His hands have made—would be, as such, insensible to the impression of time. His perfect blessedness, which as such excludes all consciousness of the sequence of events, implies His grasping, possessing, nay, *being* eternity—I say His being eternity, because eternity implies a Being who always is, and only one such Being there is, who always is, namely, the Eternal God. And thus we see how differently God and man must measure time. Man measures one portion of time by another; God measures all time by His own eternity. If we men try to conceive of eternity, we pile up in our minds ages upon ages, millions of centuries on millions of centuries, and still we are as far off as ever from reaching it. God lives in, He *is* eternity, and from that, His eternity, He looks out upon the succession of ages by which His creatures measure their brief existence. It was in view of this that the Psalmist exclaimed: "Behold, Thou hast made my days, as it were. a span long, and mine age is even as nothing in respect of Thee. A thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday,

seeing it is past as a watch in the night." And if God says, "Behold, I come quickly," we have to remember that God is speaking; that "quickly" is a relative term, which may mean one thing when man uses it and another when it is uttered by the Eternal Being.

"Behold, I come quickly." The good Bishop of Philadelphia, Demetrius, probably felt that, as far as he was concerned, these words received their fulfilment when, his pastorate being completed, he laid himself down to die. In death our Lord comes to each of us. He comes in mercy, or in judgment, to bring the present stage of existence to an end, to open out upon us another. And there are two things about death which are full of meaning, and which do not admit of any sort of contradiction. The first is the certainty that it will come to each of us some day; and the second is the utter uncertainty of the day on which it will come. "Behold, I come:" that admits of no doubt whatever. "Behold, I come quickly:" that introduces a question of date which may, nay, must be, very different in different cases, but not a very distant date in any case. That we shall die, each one of us one day, is quite certain. The verdict of experience is too plain to admit of discussion—all do die. One sentence in the Bible is not questioned by those who deny all else—"It is appointed unto all men once to die." No charm, no elixir of life, no discovery of science has availed to do more than postpone the event, which is at last inevitable. Reason has nothing to say against the certainty which she cannot help acknowledging. But in how many minds is this certainty, which reason cannot reject, sedulously kept out of the mental sight, as though to forget it were the highest wisdom. How much pain is taken to avoid the sight of anything which reminds us of death; how much to avoid speaking of it or hearing of it! What studied circumlocutions do some of us employ rather than use the word which describes that which awaits every one of us! In this we are surely less well advised than was the old Macedonian monarch, who, lest the cares of State and the blinding flatteries which surround a throne, should lead him to forget his lot as man, made it the business of one of his slaves to remind nim every morning that he had to die. Our own Christian ancestors were in this matter braver and truer to the facts than we are.

A common subject for paintings, three or four centuries ago, was what was weirdly called "The Dance of Death." There was a famous representation of it on the cloister attached to the old St. Paul's, and it was engraven in the margin of Queen Elizabeth's Prayer Book. Death, as a skeleton with a scythe in his hand, was represented as approaching men in every rank of society, in every order of Church and State, the monarch, the prelate, the man of learning, the man of business, the squire, the physician, the lawyer, the minstrel, the soldier, the pauper, the hermit—each estate was represented, so that all beholders might have brought home to them the inevitable visit of death to them. The rule of true thinking is that the first business of the mind is to familiarise itself with ascertained facts; and if this rule is to be held in the most important of all matters, then our first business as men is to take full account of, to dwell upon, to base all our calculations on, the certainty of death. The Lord of life and death Himself says to each of us: "Behold, I come."

And as death is in itself most certain, so the hour and manner of its approach is utterly uncertain. Few more curious chapters in the history of the human mind are there than that of the efforts to diminish this uncertainty by such false and fanciful sciences as Astrology. Astrology has had its day. The stars can tell nothing to you or me of the destiny that awaits us, but we moderns try to make up for the supposed loss by a more searching examination of nature. We measure the strength of our constitution, the progress of a disease, all that is likely to retard, all that is likely to accelerate, man's descent into the grave, with a patient and an anxious accuracy of which our forefathers dreamt not; and yet how often may it be said, even in the sphere of nature, that "nothing is probable except the unforeseen"! How often does some hidden mischief from within, or some unanticipated influence from without, burst in upon and baffle our nicest calculations! The invalids who have been invalids for years live on and on as though they would never die. The young, the strong, the high-spirited, those who have the promise of life before them, are hurried by some fatal accident, or by some swift disease, away out of our sight into the world of the departed. The lot of those who to the eye of man have

an equal prospect of life is, in fact, often so different. It is now as our Lord described it: "Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken and the other left. Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken and the other left." When the end before us is so certain and the date of its approach so utterly uncertain, man's true wisdom cannot be doubtful. It is a matter on which the most clear-sighted philosophy and the most fervid religious faith are entirely agreed—it is to sit easily to the things of time; it is to keep the eye fixed on that which will follow after time; it is day by day to untwine the bands and cords which scenes and persons among whom we live here are constantly winding around our hearts, that we may be ready at a short notice to quit them for the world in which all is lasting and all is real. Duty will not be done less thoroughly because done consciously of a passing scene, since if it is done rightly, it will be with an eye to that higher existence for which it is a preparation. "But this I say, brethren, the time is short; it remaineth that both they that have wives be as though they had none, and they that weep as though they wept not, and they that rejoice as though they rejoiced not, and they that buy as though they possessed not, and they that use this world as not using to the full, for the fashion of this world passeth away."

At Philadelphia the memories were still fresh of the earthquake which a generation before had laid the city in ruins, and there was no saying at what moment an angry multitude might not attempt the extinction of the local church in a tempest of fire and blood. We may be sure that the Bishop to whom the message was sent, "Behold, I come quickly," would have had in his mind those earlier words of the Divine Master, "Watch ye, therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour at which the Son of man cometh." Beyond all question, the words mean this: "Be ready for Christ's coming; before He comes prepare for death, before you find, as you will find one day, that you are actually dying." Certainly there are instances of death-bed repentance which, like that of the penitent thief on the cross, compress into a few minutes the work of years, and illustrate conspicuously the triumphant power of the grace of the Redeemer. But when modern

unbelief, concentrating its gaze upon an entirely one-sided conception of the "service of man," objects to us that a religion which attributes saving efficacy in death-bed repentance is hostile to the general interests of morality because it offers a way of escape from, and so a motive for persevering in, a bad life, the answer is that the objector mistakes the rare exception for the constant rule. The rule is that men die as they have lived; the rule is that habit which is strong in life is stronger than ever when the mind has become over-clouded and the strength is failing; the rule is that a Christian who would die well must have lived well, by bearing in mind every day of his life those words of his Redeemer, "Behold, I come quickly."

"Behold, I come quickly." The expected coming of Christ throws a flood of light upon various aspects of human existence. We are struck perhaps with the insignificance of life. Reference has already been made to the shortness of its duration, which impressed the heathen as it impressed the Psalmist, and man's frailty is not less remarkable than the shortness of his life. "Men," cries the Psalmist, "fade away suddenly like the grass; in the morning it is green, and groweth up; in the evening it is cut down, dried up, and withered;" and to the same purpose Isaiah, in the passage which Weiss's beautiful anthem has made so familiar to us: "The voice said, Cry; and he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field; the grass withereth, the flower fadeth." And, as life is short, so it is largely, for a great number of persons, unhappy. "Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live and is full of misery"—that is the rule. Much of the disorder and unhappiness that is in the world is the product of the undisciplined passions of men; but we have only to think of the millions of human beings who have lived and who still, in distant parts of the world, live under cruel and despotic government, or without any order or government at all, amid scenes of violence and scenes of blood. And then, again, there are multitudes who are born with some imperfection of body or, still worse, of mind, and we see them growing from infancy to manhood, and from manhood to old age, insensible to all that is beautiful in life and nature, and weighed down by

the overwhelming sense of calamity from which they cannot escape. And even where man is in possession of all his faculties of mind and body, he is often obliged to pass his life in occupations which are at once exacting and mechanical—occupations which make scarcely any demand upon the mind beyond that of attention to the movement of the feet or of the fingers, occupations which might almost or altogether be discharged by machinery, and which, taken by themselves, appear unworthy of a being capable of comprehending truth, capable of growing in the apprehension of it, capable of enjoying happiness proportioned to his own vast desires.

"Behold, I come quickly." If Christ's coming means anything, it means the introduction of a life which has no end; it means the entrance upon a world in which "neither moth nor rust doth corrupt;" it means, for all who will, succession to "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away;" the coming of our Lord means that all the wrong-doing and the passions of man, which create so much misery, will have had their day; it means an entrance, actual or possible, upon a state of existence in which there will be no sorrow nor crying, no pain or tears, no weariness, no monotony of life, "since the former things" will have "passed away;" it means the exercise of man's highest powers to the fullest extent of their capacity, the beginning of an existence in which thought and heart and will will rest in perfectly ecstatic satisfaction on their one true Object, and an existence which will last for ever.

If a large number of human beings are disposed to look almost exclusively upon the darker side of life here, there are others who regard it chiefly as an opportunity for enjoyment, and often of unlawful enjoyment. The wealthy have certainly the means of making it a succession of pleasurable sensations, and the social reformers, or some of them, of our own time, in imitation it would seem of some of the Roman emperors of old, are hard at work in endeavouring to bring about a state of things in which these pleasurable sensations shall be shared, if possible, by all classes of the community. And as the poor who have few such enjoyments look at the houses and equipages of the possessors of wealth, they think sometimes of their owners—and often, let me say, very unjustly—as a

people who must be supremely happy, because, in words which have been used, "they need do nothing, and they can eat every day until they can eat no more, and, above all, they can enjoy themselves as they like." Nothing probably is more certain than that the pleasures of sense, at any rate when pursued beyond a certain limit, are so far from promoting happiness that they actively destroy it, they destroy the very organs and faculties which are the instruments of the pleasurable sensations; then tend steadily to destroy the physical frame which is the seat of the sensations. They cannot be the true pleasures of a being like man, since they exclude, and are hostile to, the nobler parts of his nature, namely, the rational and moral parts of it. They are pleasures which belong to man in common with lower animals, only the lower animals certainly appear to enjoy them in a greater degree than man. It surely is not for this purpose that man was endowed with the splendid light of reason, with the vast wealth of imagination, with the retentive grasp of memory, with the imperial energy of will, with the constant restless activity of desire and hope reaching out from the actual and the visible into the unseen and the future. How superfluous is the whole higher side of man's nature, if his true happiness lies in the pleasures of sense! True it is that a large number of men and women do in each generation devote themselves with an astonishing ardour to the pursuit of these pleasures, so great a number indeed that they create a body of false sentiment which holds that such pleasures are the true happiness of man; and in a city like Philadelphia—half Greek and half Asiatic—there would have been a large number of people of this opinion, there would have been customs, institutions, even worships, which to the anguish of the Bishop Demetrius tended to foster it. Now this devotion to the pleasures of sense is an illusion which will vanish at the coming of the Lord Jesus. "Behold, I come quickly." He would not be Himself if His appearance could sanction that which He became incarnate in order to destroy. "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they were married and were given in marriage, until the day came that Noah entered into the Ark, and the flood came and swept them all away."

And many men who would not care to use wealth as a means of gratifying the senses yet do value it as a means of gratifying ambition. They would not care to be gluttons or profligates, but they value the consideration and respect which are paid to high position. To be a peer rather than a commoner, a member of Parliament rather than a voter, an archbishop rather than a simple parish clergyman, seems to them to be desirable on account on the homage which the higher position exacts. In reality the notion that any real satisfaction belongs to the higher position is a fiction of the imagination, and it is only a possible fiction until the coveted position is actually enjoyed, when the fiction is forthwith dissipated by contact with reality. Until a man reaches the desired place of honour he conceives himself, by a kind of inflation of the imagination, to be able somehow to expand himself over the entire sphere in which he would preside; but, having reached it, he knows that he is the same man, with the same very limited faculties, that he was before, and that he has at command no surer avenues to the true satisfaction of his life than before were open to him. No doubt, there are ambitions and ambitions. There is the ambition which seeks harder service or more extended opportunities for work, side by side with the ambition which aims at greater personal dignity and power and ease; and men's motives are very mixed, so mixed that the best often have in them an alloy of selfishness, while the worst are not always without some ingredient of disinterestedness. But let us listen: "Behold, I come quickly." It is the coming of One Who has taken the measure of human life, and Who, by His incarnation and His death, has put His own mark and certificate on real greatness; "He took on Him the form of a slave, He was made in the likeness of man." "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who, when He was rich, yet for our sakes He became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich."

And there is yet another class—men who despise the pleasures of sense, and for whom the ambitions of public life have no attraction, but who devote themselves to knowledge of polite letters. That pleasures of intellect are much higher than those of sense, and even higher than those of public life, is sufficiently indisputable. They are, as a rule,

worthier of man, they are in their own nature more refined, they are certainly more lasting; but are they the true satisfaction of man as man? Obviously they are denied, and always will be denied, to the great majority of human beings. In order to enjoy them, abilities of a certain kind, and at least considerable opportunities of culture, are necessary, and this shows they can never be shared except by a few, and, if so, they cannot be the satisfaction of man as man. The cultivated class in the old heathen world did not feel this difficulty. They were content to believe that that might be the highest good of man which only a few men—themselves included—could possibly enjoy; but the larger humanity of the modern world, which is itself, whether it respects it or not, a creation of the Gospel—cannot admit the truth of any such supposition. And, further, the pleasures of intellect are very dependent on circumstances. They require leisure, the absence of serious anxiety, fairly good health, in order to be secured. The invalid, the unfortunate, the friendless can hardly ever hope to secure them. Nay, more, the increase of knowledge, apart from other things, means, as the Bible tells us, an increase of sorrow. Knowledge of itself is not enjoyment; knowledge only procures us enjoyment when it introduces us to some object which appeals to the affections. The seat of true enjoyment or happiness is not in the intellect; it is in the heart. Knowledge of itself, and without the guidance of religion, only opens to the mind vast and bewildering problems, which, whatever else may be said about them, do not make men happy. "Behold, I come quickly." It is the word of Him in Whom, as we Christians believe, are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge of Him Who has nothing to learn from the very wisest of the sons of men, but Who has said to all of us: "Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of Heaven."

And, lastly, there are those to whom the service of God manifested in His blessed Son, incarnate, crucified, and risen for man, is the main object of human life—men who living in this world and doing their duty in it to the best of their power, because from a pure and high motive, yet are not of it; men who set their affections on things above and not on earth, and

look forward to the day "when He Who is their life shall appear," in the humble hope that they too will appear with Him in glory. For this day they have been preparing; for this they have been renouncing the world, the flesh, and the devil; for this they have embraced, each according to his measure, the Cross of Christ, the cross which means a discipline no less truly than it means salvation. One such, as I have only just heard, one such has assuredly passed away, within the last few hours—a man whose name was very prominent in controversy a few years ago, but who has of late been withdrawn by illness from his public duties, and whose true character as a servant of God and as a devoted friend of the poor will probably be more generally recognised than in past years now that he has gone. Such, no doubt, were many of the Christians gathered around the first Bishop of the Church of Philadelphia, such probably was the Bishop himself. But they had, as we have, one great problem before them: Would they persevere unto the end? Would they have a share, not only in the present kingdom, but in the patience of Jesus? Would not the ceaseless opposition of the heathen, the manifold temptations of the scenes amid which they lived, the hardest battle of all, that with their own truant hearts and undisciplined tempers,—would not these things weary them out and lead them to give up the contest before the crown was won? Ah! that was then, that is now, a most anxious question for anyone who is serving our Lord Jesus Christ; and if there is any one conviction that can brace the will and enable us to endure unto the end, it is the conviction that whether in death or in judgment, yet certainly at last, Christ's word to the angel of Philadelphia will be fulfilled, "Behold, I come quickly; hold fast that thou hast, that no man take thy crown."

May our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has shed His blood for us, of His mercy so invigorate us by the recollection that He will one day come to each and to all of us, that, when at last He makes His word good, we may know Whom we have believed, and may welcome Him with the words, ancient as they are, but always new, "Lo! this is our God, we have waited for Him: He will save us."

THE INCARNATION.*

"And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."—JOHN i. 14.

CHRISTMAS DAY, we are all agreed, is the greatest birthday in the year. It is the birthday of the greatest Man, of the greatest Teacher of men, of the greatest Benefactor of the human race that ever lived. It is this, but it is also much more; for on this day was born One Who, while He is truly God, is also, nay immeasurably more than, man. He Who was born on this day did not begin to be when He was conceived by His human Mother, since He had already existed before all worlds from the eternity. His human nature, His human body, and His human soul were not, as is the case with us, the whole outfit of His being: they were in truth the least important part of it. He had, I repeat it, already lived for an eternity when He condescended to make a human body and a human soul in an entirely new sense His own by uniting them to his Divine and Eternal person. And thus He wore them as a garment; He acted through them as through an instrument during his life on earth, as He does now in the courts of heaven. And thus the Apostle says that "He took upon Him the form of a servant," and that "He took not on Him the nature of angels, but he took on Him the seed of Abraham;" and so, in the collect for to-day, we plead that He took our nature upon Him, and was at this time born of a pure virgin. And it was in this sense that He became, or was made, flesh. After existing from eternity, He united to Himself for evermore a perfect and representative sample of the bodily and immaterial nature of man, and, thus clothed with it, as on this day He entered into the world of sense and time; "the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us."

It is perhaps not surprising that from the early days of Christianity men should have misconceived or misstated what was meant by this central but mysterious truth of the Christian creed, the Incarnation of the Eternal Son. In truth the misconceptions have been, and are, many and great.

* Preached in St. Paul's Cathedral, on the afternoon of Christmas Day, 1887.

Sometimes Christians have been supposed to hold that two persons were united in Christ, instead of two natures in this single person; sometimes that the Infinite Being was confined within the finite nature which He assumed; sometimes that God ceased to be really Himself when He took to Him man's nature; sometimes that the human nature which He took was absorbed into, and annihilated by, the union with the Divine. All of these misconceptions of the true sense of the Apostle have been considered and rejected by the Christian Church, and "the right faith is that we believe and confess that our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is God and Man; God, of the substance of His Father, begotten before all worlds: and Man, of the substance of His Mother, born in the world; perfect God and perfect Man: of a reasonable soul and human flesh subsisting; equal to the Father as touching His Godhead: and inferior to the Father as touching His Manhood. Who although He be God and Man: yet He is not two, but one Christ." Thus did God the Son take the sinful out of the dust and lift the poor out of the mire when He raised our human nature to the incomparable prerogative of union with Himself. So real was and is this union, that all the needs, acts, and sufferings of His human body, all the thoughts, reasonings, resolves, emotions of His human soul, while being properly human, are yet also the acts, words, sufferings, the thoughts, reasonings, resolves, and emotions of the Eternal Son Who controls all, Who imparts to all the value of the elevations which belong to the Infinite and the Supreme. Thus, although Christ suffered in His human soul in the garden, and in His human body on the cross, His sufferings acquire an entirely superhuman meaning and value from the person of the Eternal Word to which His manhood was joined. And so St. Paul goes so far as to say that God purchased the Church with His own blood, meaning that the blood which was shed by the Crucified was that of a human body personally and for ever united to God the Son.

It was perhaps inevitable that the question should be asked how such a union of two natures—things which differ as the the Creator differs from the creature, as the Infinite differs from the finite—was possible. It might perhaps be enough to reply that "with God all things are possible," all things, at

least, which do not contradict His moral perfections—that is to say, His essential nature; and most assuredly no such contradiction can be detected in the Divine Incarnation. But, in truth, it ought not to be difficult for a person possessed of such a composite nature as is man to answer this question. Perhaps such a being as man might have been reasonably expected never to have asked it. For what is the Incarnation but the union of two natures, the Divine and the human, in a single Person, Who governs both? And what is man, what are you and I, but samples, on an immeasurably lower level, of a union of two totally different substances, one material, the other immaterial, under the presidency and control of a single human personality? What can be more remote from each other in their properties than are matter and spirit? What would be more incredible antecedently to experience than the union of such substances as are matter and spirit—the union of a human body and a human soul in a single personality? And yet that they are so united is a matter of experience to every one of us. We only do not marvel at it because we are so infinitely familiar with it. Day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute, we observe, each within himself, the central authority directing and controlling on the one hand the movements and operations of an animal frame, and, on the other, the faculties and the efforts of an intelligent spirit, both of which find in this central authority which we call "a person" their point and unity. How this can be we know not. We know not how an immaterial essence can dictate its movements to a material arm or leg, but we see that, as a matter of fact, it does this; and we can only escape from the admitted mystery into difficulties far greater than any we leave behind by frankly avowing ourselves Materialists and denying that man has anything that can properly be called a soul, that he is anything more than an oddly agitated mass of bones and muscles. If we shrink from this, we must recognise in the composite structure of our own mysterious being the means of answering the question about the possibility of the Divine Incarnation. As the reasonable soul and flesh is one man, so God and man is one, because He Who could thus bring together matter and spirit, notwithstanding their contrariety of nature, and could constitute out of them a single human personality or being, He

might surely, if it pleased Him, raise both matter and spirit, raise a human body and a human soul to union with His own Divinity under the control of His eternal Person. Those who have taken, even superficially, the measure of the twofold nature of man ought not to find it hard to understand that, for sufficient reasons, God and man might be united in a single person, or, as St. John puts it, that the Word might be made flesh and might dwell among us.

"But what," it may be asked, "can be conceived of as moving God thus to unite Himself with a created form? Is not such an innovation on the associations, if not on the conditions, of His Eternal Being too great to be accounted for by any cause or motive that we can possibly assign for it?" Now here we are in a region in which it need hardly be said we dare not indulge our own conjectures as to the fitness of things. We do not know enough of the Eternal mind to presume to account for its resolves by any suppositions of human origin. If we are to take a single step forward, it must be under the guidance of Revelation. But when men speak of the Incarnation as an innovation on the eternal life of God so great as to be beyond accounting for, or even conceiving of, they forget a still older innovation —if the word may be permitted—about which there is no room whatever for doubt; they forget that, after existing for an eternity in solitary blessedness, contemplating Himself and rejoicing in the contemplation, God willed to surround Himself with creatures who should derive their life from Him, should be sustained in it by Him, should subsist within His all-encompassing presence, and yet be utterly distinct from Him. Creation was surely an astonishing innovation on the life of God, and creation, as we know, involved possibilities which led to much else beyond if God was to be served by moral creatures endowed with reflective reason, with conscience, with free will. With them, God offered him the noblest, because a perfectly voluntary, service. This prerogative dignity necessarily carried with it the possibility of failure, and man in fact, even in the very beginning of his history, did fail. That God should have created at all is indeed a mystery; that He should have created a moral world of which He must have foreseen the history is a still greater mystery; but that, having done this, He, the

Eternal Justice, He, the Eternal Charity, should have left His handiwork to itself would have been—had it been true, had it been possible—a much greater and, I will add, a much darker mystery. As God must have created out of love, so out of love He must bring a remedy to the ruined creatures of His hands, though the form of the remedy He alone could prescribe. We do not know whether there were other ways of restoring a fallen race; probably there were, since God is infinite in His resources as in all else, but we may be sure of this that the way adopted was the best. Of other remedies nothing has been told us. What we do know is the truth of that saying that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." What we do confess before God and man is that, being of one substance with the Father, by Whom all things were made, He for us men, and for our salvation, came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man.

And now, perhaps, someone is thinking to himself, "What is the exact appropriateness of much that has been said to the afternoon of such a day as Christmas Day?" Let us consider. In the course of his history, man has by turns depreciated and exaggerated his true importance among the creatures of God. Sometimes he has made himself the measure of all things, as though his was the sovereign mind, and the Creator a being Whose proceedings could be easily understood by him. Sometimes he has appeared to revel in self-depreciation, placing himself side by side with, or below, the beasts that perish, insisting on his animal kinship with them, and endeavouring to ignore or to deny all that points to a higher element in his being. Sometimes, in a strange spirit of paradox, he has combined theories which ascribe to himself an origin and an end as degraded as well can be, with passionate assertions of his undoubted capacity to judge of all things in earth and heaven. Just now the depreciatory account of man is the popular one, and we hear around us echoes of the language which was used on this subject by the early assailants of Christianity. Celsus, the eclectic philosopher, who compiled his assortment of objections to the Christian creed about the year of our Lord 170, insisted again and again that man is not really superior even to the more intelligent insects, since bees

and ants organise themselves into cities and states under recognised rulers. They make war upon, and peace with, each other, and appear to experience the same vicissitudes of fortune, if they do not feel the same jealousies and the same ambitions, as human beings. Christianity, according to Celsus, has made man think too much of his own importance in nature, and some modern successors of Celsus, repeating his estimate of man's place among the creatures, go on to call attention to the insignificance of man's dwelling-place. We are reminded that it is no longer possible to think of this earth as the centre of the universe for whose benefit all else exists, a palace around which a fair domain is laid out with a view to its beauty and usefulness, a comfortable home for the most favoured of God's creatures, to lighten which the sun rises every morning, and the stars shine brightly every night. Man, we are told, can no longer look to the heavens above his head as the spangled roof of the tent in which he dwells, nor can he confidently assume that an eclipse or a conjunction of planets has no other object than to assure him of some secret in his petty destiny. We now know that the planet on which we live is only one of the smaller satellites of our sun, while this sun itself is but one of thousands of stars which are moving in an orb, which it takes vast ages to complete, round some still undiscovered centre. We now know that our eye rests on stars, the distance of which from this our earth cannot be expressed in figures, stars whose light, flashing with the speed of light, takes at the least even centuries to reach us. And as we gaze into the boundless spaces which astronomy thus opens on us, the insignificance of man's dwelling-place becomes increasingly evident to us, and, as we reflect upon it, it seems to involve, and to make more and more evident, the corresponding and utter insignificance of man. And this impression about the small world of human life is deepened by what may be observed of the vicissitudes to which men are exposed, not as individuals, but in masses. It is a commonplace that life comes to be held very cheap during the ravages of an epidemic, such as was the Plague. The imagination finds it hard to think that much real value can attach to existences which to all appearance are so easily destroyed, and in such numbers. So, again, the survey of

the thousands of the dead and dying after a great battle like Solferino has for the time being filled a spectator with an overpowering sense that man is too worthless a being to be cared for, and that his lot is controlled by a pitiless and mechanical fate. Every ocean steamship that sinks beneath the waves of the Atlantic with its great freight of human beings, every coal mine that is the scene of an explosion, whereby scores of families around the pit's mouth are left without their bread-winner, nay, every vast collection of men such as you may see any day in the streets of London, each one of whom is solitary, unknown, perhaps unsympathised with in the great crowd around him,—all these scenes help to deepen the sense of men's pettiness, and to lead a large number of human beings to think of themselves and of others as leaves blown by the wind of destiny, whither or why who can say?

Of course, apart from the Christian faith, there is another side to the matter which nature suggests to us. When we look steadily at any one man—the feeblest, the most worthless, as we may think,—we become conscious of his having some titles even to a profound and anxious interest. His reason, his conscience, his character, cannot be attentively examined, whatever be his history, without revealing these titles. Whatever men may say in their more sombre moods, they do not really believe in all that some philosophers would tell them about the insignificance of man. Just consider the diligence with which a trial for murder is followed by thousands of readers of the papers. Here is a man who, before he became a criminal, threaded his way unnoticed through the crowd—one of the leaves, as we are told, drifting any whither before the winds of destiny. But this man is put on his trial for his life, and he immediately becomes an object of profound interest, of whatever character. Why, if he is only an animal whose deeds and whose death are alike prescribed by fate, an animal with no immaterial part in him, no endless destiny before him,—why, if this is the case, should the question of life and death be debated more anxiously in his case than in that of an ox or a sheep? Why should the court in which his case is heard be crowded with listeners, the cross-examination of the witnesses scanned with such jealous severity, the words that fall from the presiding judge scrutinised with such anxious

attention; the reply of the counsel for the prisoner, the summing up, the verdict of the jury, all waited for with such hushed yet irrepressible eagerness, the report of the trial read and read again by thousands outside the court who have no personal knowledge whatever either of the victim or of the accused, no personal stake, however remote, in the trial? Do you say this is to be explained by a widely-diffused appetite for all that touches on the confines of the horrible, that a sensation relieves the monotony of thousands of lives, and that those who do not need this relief still are not superior to the instincts of a vulgar curiosity? You cannot have attentively considered the seriousness—I had almost said the passion—with which a trial for murder is followed by persons who would not on any account give time and attention to cases of another kind, if you say this. No; men are thus deeply moved because a human life is at stake; because the future of a man's destiny is being weighed in the balance; because it is instinctively felt that much more is in question than the fatalism or the materialism of some of our modern teachers would at all allow. Ah! at those solemn moments the deprecatory theory of man's nature and origin are forgotten; they give way to a higher and more adequate sense of his real place in the universe. Even the poor prisoner in the dock—who may, for aught I know, be guilty of the crime laid to his charge, on whose countenance, it may be, vice has traced the history of a long and degraded ascendency—even he, for the moment, represents the ineffaceable, the indestructible greatness of man. He cannot be sentenced to die without stirring in us all that sense of our true place as immortal beings among the creatures of God, now that he is bidden to put it to the solemn proof by being pushed, forced violently, across the line that divides the living from those whom we name "the dead."

There are, of course, many other ways in which men show that they recognise the true dignity of their nature, amid all its feebleness and its degradations. But it must be owned that man's judgment about himself when he is left to himself rises and sinks with the varying circumstances of his life, with the varying moods of his mind. Left to himself, man has no very solid ground of confidence in any estimate that he may form. He

oscillates with timid indecision between grotesque assertions and unworthy denials of his real place among the creatures of God. If he is to discover at once the greatness of his needs and the greatness of his capacities it must be by some standard utterly independent of himself; it must be by some event breaking in upon and elevating his life as did the Divine Incarnation, by uniting man's nature for ever to that of the Being Who made him. The Incarnation restored to man his self-respect, while it also made him feel his moral poverty without God, his utter dependence upon God.

But that human nature in which the Eternal Word condescended and condescends to dwell can never be treated by a Christian believer as other than capable of the highest destinies. Let us think for a moment of the life of our Lord upon earth as seen from this point of view, as putting such high, such exceptional honour upon human nature. The moral beauty of which mankind is capable appeared in the earthly life of Jesus as it never appeared before, as it has never appeared since. Had man invented such a moral portrait, the invention would have been scarcely less matter of wonder than the reality; but no literary creation could have made so deep and enduring a mark on generations of human beings as has been made by the life of Jesus. Yet we can only surrender ourselves to its power upon one condition. We must frankly admit that it is the life of the Word made flesh no less truly than the life of the Son of Mary. A mere man might have been inspired to say: "Blessed are the poor in spirit," "Blessed are they that mourn," "Blessed are the meek," "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness," "Blessed are the merciful," "Blessed are the poor in heart," "Blessed are the peacemakers," Blessed are they that are persecuted for righteousness' sake;" but no mere man, being humble and veracious, could have said of himself: "I am the Life, I am the Light, of the world," "I and the Father are one Being," "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father," "No man knoweth the Son but the Father, neither knoweth any man the Father save the Son." Jesus says too much about Himself if He is to be measured by a standard of merely human excellence. If He is only man we cannot say that all His language is either modest or truthful. All indeed

falls into its place, if He is also the Eternal Son of God ; and in embracing this central, this vital truth, we recognise the supreme significance of His life as that of "God manifest in the flesh." Embrace this truth, and it is not hard to understand how His death on Calvary might avail even for much more than the world's redemption, and how, at His word, the weak and poor elements of water and bread and wine might become channels of spiritual blessings, or veils of a sacred Presence, contact with which would mean new power and life for the souls and bodies of men.

Nor does it matter whether such a life as that of Jesus, radiant with the beauty, charged with the force, of God, was lived on a large sun or on a small planet. The moral world has, after all, no relation to the material. The perfect moral being is not embraced, as some of our physicists would seem to be, by mere material bulk. If it is true of God, that "He hath no pleasure in the strength of an horse, neither delighteth He in any man's legs," so it is true that, since the heavens and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him, the vastest stars and suns have no particular claim on account of their size on His regard. When He would unite Himself to a human form in and through which to achieve the elevation and the redemption of His human family, He chose the scene where the Divine work would be best achieved, He chose the little planet on which we His moral creatures live, He chose as His birthplace, not Rome, not even Jerusalem, but Bethlehem, though it was little among the thousands of Judah, He was laid in the rude manger outside the crowded village, "He did not abhor the Virgin's womb."

And, therefore, Christmas Day is the birthday of the best hopes of man ; it is the second birthday of the human family. No other day in the year reminds us more persuasively of the greatness of man—of the greatness, actual or possible, of every human being. Nothing that can be said about man's capacities, or his progress, or his prerogatives, or his rights, approaches, even distantly, to what is involved in God's so having loved this human world that He gave His only-begotten Son to take our nature upon Him. Already, while He was upon earth, we see the meaning of His appearance in the irradiated lives of those around Him. Why is it that poor fishermen like Peter

and Andrew, and peasants like Simon, and Jude, and James, and tax-gatherers like Matthew, are far more to us than the great soldiers and statesmen who ruled the Roman world? Why is the half-witted penitent of Magdala infinitely more interesting than the stately rulers who move, amid the crowds of prostrate slaves, through the halls of the Cæsars? It is because the wonder-working touch of the Word made flesh has already begun to create in these poor country folk the first samples of a new humanity in which human nature should recover its lost dignity, its lost self-respect; it is because they would say each from his place in Paradise what one of them has already written down upon the pages of the everlasting Gospel, "We beheld His glory; the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Surely Christmas, as the birthday of human greatness, should kindle in us the sense of our true human dignity, should nerve us to claim and to protect it with all that invigorates true Christian life. May "the Father of glory give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him that, the eyes of our understanding being enlightened, we may know what is the hope of His calling, and what the riches of the glory of His inheritance among the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe."

And, as Christmas Day is the birthday of true human dignity, so it is the birthday of true human brotherhood. Kneeling around the cradle of the Incarnate Word, we may understand that great sentence of His Apostle that for the new man, renewed after the image of Him that created him, "there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free, but Christ is all, and in all." At the manger of Bethlehem we may dare to look forward, in some coming time, to that union of human lives, of human hearts, of which the noblest of our race have dreamed again and again—a brotherhood which has sometimes been recommended by abstract argument, which has sometimes been dictated by revolutionary terrorism, but which, to be genuine, must be the perfectly free movement of hearts and wills drawn towards each other by a supreme attraction. That attraction we find in the Divine Child of Bethlehem, born that He might redeem, that He might regenerate the world; and all the

courtesies and kindnesses of this happy season between members of families, and members of households, and members of the same parish, between the rich and the poor, and the old and the young, and the so-called great, and the so-called insignificant, are rightly done in His honour, Who came to reveal to us what we may be in Him, and through Him; came also to unite us with each other in union with Himself. If the ideal is still, as heretofore, only too far from being realised, if we hear of sombre jealousies between classes, of rumours of war between powerful countries, of much else at home that is the negation of that which He came to do, let us look to it that our part, however humble its scale, while we linger on this passing scene, be that of men who have heard to some purpose the angels' song in the meadows of Bethlehem: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men in whom God is well pleased."

THE DIGNITY OF SERVICE.*

"I am among you as he that serveth."—LUKE xxii. 27.

WHEN, in His love and condescension, our Lord and Saviour came among us, nearly nineteen centuries ago, He brought with Him a new ideal and standard of what human life should be. It differed in many respects from the standard which was accepted by His Jewish countrymen; it differed, of course, still more widely and deeply from that which was generally accepted by the heathen; and in nothing was this latter difference more marked than in the encouragement which our Divine Saviour gave to a life of service, and the high honour He put upon it. In the old pagan days it was generally held that the best and happiest thing for a man was to do as little work as possible, and to be waited on as much as might be by all around him. This idea prevailed very largely throughout the ancient world; but its greatest sway was in the east. In the opinion of an oriental, the happiest of human beings was a despot of the Babylonian or the Persian type. His throne

* Preached in St. Paul's Cathedral, on Sunday afternoon, December 19th, 1886.

was an isolated social pinnacle, around which multitudes of men fawned and trembled, and he was only approached with prostrations of the most abject character. His word, though expressing but a passing whim, was absolute law, before which the greatest as well as the lowest of his subjects bowed their heads. Every duty that could make life irksome was discharged active, for him by an array of slaves, silent, obsequious, accomplished. Everything that could irritate or disturb him was, so far as possible, kept out of the reach of his eye and his ear, and thus his life was spent in a ceaseless round of serene pomposities, in which the monotony of undisputed command was only varied by the sensual indulgences which it placed at his disposal. This was, nay, it still is, over a large district of Asia, the prevalent idea of human happiness. Nor was it much otherwise when our Lord was on the earth; and for three centuries afterwards, among the subjects of imperial Rome, millions of men looked up to the reigning Cæsar, to a Tiberius, to a Nero, to a Domitian, as to the happiest of mortals, who had presumably unbounded wealth, unbounded power, and above all, nothing to do, or, at least, no more to do than he had a mind for. Such happiness was indeed, in the popular opinion, more than human in its compass; and so when the Cæsars betook themselves to claiming the honours of Divinity, and had temples, and altars, and statues erected to promote their worship, their obsequious subjects, instead of resenting the absurdity and the blasphemy of the proceeding, found it quite natural to acquiesce in, or even to anticipate, it. What, they thought, could be nearer Divinity?—what could be, in the judgment of those toiling millions, largely slaves, than a human being who had so much power, so much money, and, above all, so much leisure? Israel was an Asiatic people; but in Israel the revelation of the One true God kept the exaggerations which were natural to the Asiatic temperament more or less in check. A people which had upon its heart and its conscience the impress, the awe-inspiring impress, of the Everlasting and Infinite Creator, could not readily bend before ideals of human happiness which appeared unquestionable to Babylonians or Persians. The Jewish kings, however disloyal at times to the religion of Sinai, were never, as a class, kings of the thoroughly oriental type.

They were themselves subjects of a Being Whose infinite superiority they could never wholly forget. They were servants of God as well as rulers of their people. The most oriental of them is perhaps Solomon himself, and yet Solomon's life, notwithstanding its parade of wealth and luxury, and of worse things towards its close, was, in the main, a life of service. For, in truth, the mosaic law had been in many respects a consecration of labour, and the Prophets again and again insisted upon aspects of the will of God and of human duty which were entirely opposed to the ideas on which was built the throne of an Oriental Sultan. Especially in the last period of his ministry, Isaiah's great prediction of a promised Messiah, not as an unoccupied sovereign of men, but as the servant, the servant of God, toiling, misunderstood, insulted, suffering, dying, yet eventually triumphant,—this was an inspiring picture which could not but leave its mark on the mind of Israel. Still, whatever the reason was—whether it was their captivity in Babylon, or their subsequent contact with the Syrian kings in the Maccabean period—Israel was often haunted by the Eastern ideal, which, nevertheless, it did not wholly accept. Our Lord implied this when He asked His hearers whether, when they went out in the wilderness to see St. John the Baptist, they had expected to find "a man clothed with soft raiment," like the well-dressed and leisurely officials who hung about the ante-chambers of an Eastern palace. His hearers were still possessed by the notion that there was something especially blessed in being thus altogether provided for, and having nothing to do; but it was upon the Gentile world that our Lord had His eye, at least, mainly, when insisting, in His teaching, on the blessedness of service. It was on the Kings of the Gentiles, exercising lordship over them, and representing immunity from obedience and work, that our Lord was thinking, when he pointed to the Son of man, Who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and to give His life. It was a world which deemed obedience and work to be degrading, as well as unwelcome, that pointed the implied contrast to the words, "I am among you as he that serveth." Yes! In the fulness of time He came holding up what was practically a new idea of what the best human life should be—the idea of life voluntarily devoted to service.

What do we mean by service? We mean, generally, two things—obedience and occupation. There is much occupation that is no real service: it is self-chosen; it is motiveless; it is frivolous. And there is obedience which does not involve occupation, or, at least, active occupation. It is the constrained obedience of the prisoner in his cell; it is the unproductive obedience of the mutes at a funeral. True service means work, and work performed, not at a man's own discretion, but under orders of some kind; at the very least, under an imperative sense of duty. It was in this sense that our Lord led a life of service.

Now, Holy Scripture speaks of this aspect of His appearance among us men as involving a contrast, almost a violent contrast, with His pre-existent state. Being in the form of God, He did not look upon His equality with God as a prize to be eagerly clutched—such is the force of the original—but He took on Him the form of a servant; He folded it round His eternal person, He assumed His body of flesh and blood, His true human soul, that in it He might work and obey, rendering to the Father a true and perfect service on behalf of all His brethren. His incarnation meant, as we know, much else than this, but among other things it meant, at the least, this capacity for perfect service. This feature of our Lord's life is stamped upon it from His early youth. As a boy of twelve, He went down with His mother and St. Joseph to Nazareth, and "was subject to them." We can picture Him, even as a young child, running day by day by His mother's side from the holy home, which was, as it would seem, some way up the hill on the slope of which Nazareth is built, down to the fountain which still flows in the valley, and watching her fill her pitchers with water, and helping her, as He grew in years, to carry her burden up to their humble dwelling. We can see Him, as a young man, working in the carpenter's shop with His foster-father, St. Joseph, doing the rougher work, no doubt, sent on messages to the customers, carrying the timbers, sharpening the tools, fastening pieces of wood together in a rude sort of way, and leaving it to the older workmen to put the finishing touch to what He had begun.

And when He entered on His ministry His whole later life was marked by the character of service. Consider His teaching.

While, on the one hand, the truths which He taught were so profound, so sublime, that even the reluctant intelligence of His keener contemporaries proclaimed that "never man spake like this man," His method of instruction was accommodated to the narrow minds, to the vulgar prejudices, to the moral obtuseness, to the slow and gross understanding, of the peasants who followed and who listened to Him. If we imagine Bacon or Newton spending their whole lives in a Sunday-school, and teaching very young children in words of one syllable, we should only get a very distant and faint idea of the intellectual interval that parted our Divine Lord from the disciples who understood Him best. His parables, His explanations of His parables, His repetitions again and again of what He had said already, His patient refutation of arguments which must have appeared to Him infinitely shallow and silly —in short, His whole bearing as a Teacher, face to face with His disciples and with the Jews, bears the constant imprint of service. So it was with His actions. He never moved about Palestine on the principle of a traveller who had no ties, and who was free to go wherever he liked. Every movement, every action, was dictated by the exigencies of a law—the law of obedience to the Father's will. He did not invite or seek success. He did not look out for audiences or neighbourhoods which might do Him, as we speak, some sort of justice. He spent those three years within the compass of a territory scarcely larger than the largest of our English counties, and in a ministry which seldom, or never, won for Him any return of gratitude or appreciation. "What a waste!" many a man might be tempted to exclaim, in an age when, as in ours, publicity is taken to be the test of excellence—"What a waste of power, of capacity for effecting enormous results, upon a theatre too insignificant to permit them!" What a waste, indeed, unless that waste had been more than justified by the note of moral beauty which more than atones for what we call failure,—the note of perfect service. On one day, as you will remember, when the end was close at hand, He exhibited the inner law of His life in outward characters, so that all might read them—He served His disciples in the literal menial way of an oriental slave: "Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He was come from

God, and went to God, He riseth from supper and laid aside His garments, and took a towel, and girded Himself. After that, He poureth water into a bason and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel, wherewith He was girded." What a spectacle! this picture of One, before Whom the highest of the created intelligences is utterly insignificant, demeaning Himself as though He were the lowest and the last, washing, one by one, the feet of His wondering, sometimes reluctant, disciples; washing, among the rest, the feet of a Judas. Never, surely, never was the possible dignity, I had almost said the inherent majesty, of service illustrated so forcibly as in that humble chamber in Jerusalem, unless it was when a few hours later this servant of His brethren became, of His free will, "obedient unto death," and, ere He died, took on Him a burden which cost Him, the All-Holy as He was, more to carry than we sinners can conceive—the burden of the sins of the whole world. "He bare our sins in His own body on the Tree," as though He Himself were the representative sinner, the greatest criminal of the race. He did not flinch from the hateful burden till He had thoroughly discharged His appointed task, His unshared, unrivalled, incomparable service; He did not lay it down until He could pronounce that no further service of this highest order remained to be done, or was even needed; until He could exclaim: "It is finished."

Let us ask ourselves, brethren, why our Lord has done so much for mankind in proposing a life of service as the true life of man. Service, I apprehend, is thus necessary, in some shape, for all of us, because it involves the constant repression of those features of our nature which constantly tend to drag it down and degrade it. That acute observer of human nature, Aristotle, remarked, more than two thousand years ago, that all our faulty tendencies ranged themselves under the two heads of temper and desire—bad temper or ill-regulated desire. When the one element is not predominant in an undisciplined character, you will find, in some shape, the other; and sometimes you will find the one, and sometimes the other, at different periods in the life of the same man. Now service —that is, the voluntary undertaking of work in obedience to a higher will—is a corrective to each of those tendencies. It

is a corrective, first of all, of temper in its ordinary and every-day form of self-assertion or pride. The man who serves with the heart cannot indulge in self-assertion; he represses self if he tries to perform his service well. Each effort, each minute, each five minutes, each hour, each day of conscientious service, has the effect of keeping self down, of bidding it submit to a higher and more righteous will; and this process, steadily persevered in, ultimately represses it, if not altogether, yet very considerably; and what a substantial service this is to human nature and to human character. Be sure of this—that self-assertion, if unchecked, is pitiless when any obstacle to its gratification comes in its way. Self-assertion is Cain, who cannot pardon to Abel the acceptance of his sacrifice. Self-assertion is the brethren of Joseph, who cannot forgive those presentiments of a greatness which may eclipse their own; it is Saul, who will not tolerate David's endowments and David's popularity so near to his own throne; it is Haman, who would fain revel in the extermination of a whole people, because, forsooth, a single courtier has failed in the etiquette of some public homage to which he conceives himself to be entitled. With us, indeed, outrageous self-assertion is kept in order, more or less, by law. No Nero can fire London for the mere pleasure of contemplating the sight; no Attila, no Timour, can ravage the world for the bare satisfaction of seeing dynasties, kingdoms, cities, races crumble away, or shrink from before them in abject terror; but the same brutal willingness to sacrifice anything to self is there, even though cramped and confined within very narrow limits. It still has the power of diffusing untold wretchedness in a circle, petty or wide, as the case may be. The self-asserting man delights in making an equal or an inferior feel the full weight of his petty importance; he enjoys the pleasure of command in the exact ration of the pain or discomfort which he sees to be the cost of obedience, and thus, sooner or later, self-assertion becomes tyranny, and tyranny, sooner rather than later, means some revolt which carries with it the ruin of order. The tyrant, in the State, in the family, in the office, in the workshop, is the man bent on the assertion of self, and despite the moments of passing gratification which he enjoys, such a tyrant is really more miserable than his subjects for the governing appetite of his

character can never be adequately gratified. It is in conflict with the nature of things, it is in conflict with the laws of social life, it is in conflict with the Divine will, and, when it is repressed, curbed, crushed by voluntary work, in obedience to a higher will, a benefit of the very first order has been conferred on human nature and on human society.

And, in like manner, work voluntarily undertaken in obedience to a higher will corrects ill-regulated desire. Distinct from gross sin is the slothful, easy, enervating, self-pleasing temper, which is the soil in which gross sin grows. The New Testament calls this district of human nature "concupiscence"—that is to say, misdirected desire, desire which was meant to cleave to God, at least to centre in God, the Eternal Beauty, but which, through some bad warp, does in fact attach itself to created objects, and generally to some object attractive to the senses. This evil can only be radically cured by making God the object of desire—that is to say, by a love of God. And a true love of God will express itself in service, the service of man as well as the service of God; for, as the Apostle argues, "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God Whom he hath not seen?" Service keeps this ill-regulated desire at bay, and it centres the soul's highest desire or love more and more perfectly on its one legitimate object.

And thus incidentally it braces character, and this is what is wanted if a man is to escape from the enervation of a life of sensuous and effeminate ease. Now, look at that young man; he has been well brought up, perhaps even in a religious atmosphere, and yet all the vigour of his character is gone; it is undermined, it is sapped by the enervating influence of a life of pleasure. Perhaps he bears a noble name, but what will he do with it? what will he do with or in the old castle which some rude but vigorous ancestor won for his stock in the by-gone centuries? He breathes an atmosphere now which vitiates all that he touches and is; he delights in the literature, in the art, in the companionships which reflect the soft, nerveless character that vegetates rather than lives within him, that only feels when it ought to think, and only talks when it ought to resolve or to act. Without any true interests in one serious study, how will he be able,—that is the

problem, he thinks,—how will he be able to kill time? Ah! we may well ask. He will occupy himself still as the years go on with all that ministers to the life of self, with the balls, with the theatres, with the gossip, with the clubs that feed his deceased nature with congenial nutriment. But what will he do that costs him anything? Nothing. What will he do for the comfort and the honour of his family? Nothing. What will he do for the credit of his order, or for the glory of his country? Nothing. What will he do for the real good of mankind, or for the interests and promotion of the highest of human interests, the interests of religion? Nothing. These things mean effort, and he, poor thing, he is as incapable of effort as one of those creatures, half vegetable half animal, that stick to the rocks on the sea-shore and only open their fat, flabby mouths to eat whatever may be floated into them by the waves. Not that such characters are only to be found among the more prosperous classes of society. Human nature is just the same at either end of the social scale, whether in its regenerate or its unregenerate state; and many a man, who might find work ready to his hand and might spend an honest and happy life in the bosom of his family, but who spends his time lounging about the streets and in the public-houses till want and desperation drive him, perhaps, into violent courses, is not less a Sybarite at heart than is the other, though there is more to be said in excuse for him. When such types of character as these are common, the ruin of a great country—let us be sure of it—is not far off, and that which defers the hour of ruin is the resolute adoption by her better citizens of a life of service, of work dictated by a sense of obedience or by a sense of duty, such as was the life of which our Lord and Saviour has given us the supreme example.

It is, then, rightly the glory of our Lord, of His religion, of His Church, to have proclaimed that the true life of man is a life of service. But this glory has been made a subject of reproach by a not inconsiderable school of modern writers. "Yes," it is said, "Jesus Christ told us that He was among us as one that serveth, and He has imprinted only too successfully the mark of His servility on the Christian world. His apostles are true in this matter to the servile spirit of their Master. They preach the subjection of every soul to the higher powers

even when a Nero is on the throne of the world. They will not interfere even with slavery—it is part of the established order of things. The world, they hold, may come to an end any day, and they see no object in promoting changes which might be the last events in history." And hence Christianity has always been in favour, so we are told, of passive submission to wrong; of contented acquiescence in the indefensible; of a resignation which, if it adorns individual character, only does so at the heavy cost of protecting every antiquated social abuse that retards the progress of the race. Now, it is obvious to remark that the bearing of our Lord and His apostles in circumstances of difficulty and danger ought of itself to have made this criticism impossible. The last charge that can be brought against the fearless Preacher who confronted mobs ignorant and ferocious, and Scribes and Pharisees, less ignorant but more ferocious, with the invincible calmness that befits the possession of truth, is that He was servile. Indeed, another infidel criticism of His work is that He was a "reckless incendiary," who led a revolt against the old laws and institutions of His country, and was justly punished by their appointed guardians. And if St. Paul is classed by some among those who have misused their influence to induce men to submit to established evils without complaint or resistance, he was, as we know, described in his own day by those who most earnestly opposed him as one of a band who had "turned the world upside down." These incompatible criticisms may be left to balance or to eliminate each other, the fact being that the service enjoined by our Lord, and practised by Him and His apostles, was in no sense servile. It was voluntary service, the service of God and man, the motive of which was the love of God. Certainly the apostles did not undertake to reform the government of the Roman Empire, or to do away with slavery, by preaching revolution and a social war. They might have given trouble, at least at the close of the apostolic age, to the Roman authorities, had this been their object, for there was a deep sense of wrong among Christians, as we may read between the lines of the Epistle to the Hebrews, or even of the Epistle to the Romans; but the apostolic preaching was, "Let every soul be subject, in whatever state a man is, let him be therewith content." They might have appealed to what

they taught about justice, about the fundamental equality of all human beings before God, they might have met violence with violence, blood with blood, even though they were eventually crushed. They preferred deliberately the power of conscience to the power of the sword, they preferred silence and patience to retaliation; they won the day, not as soldiers on the battlefield, but as martyrs on the blood-stained floors of amphitheatres, and they conquered by suffering.

What is it, brethren, that prevents the service of our fellow-men from degenerating into servility? It is the consideration that in this service, in all service, a Christian aims, and aims before all else, at serving God. As St. Paul says of the Christian slave when performing menial duties for his heathen master, he is to do it, "not with eye service, as a man pleaser, but in singleness of heart, fearing God." God is the first object of a Christian's service, and then man for God's sake. "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all for the glory of God,"—that is the rule. And it follows that no man can be served except so far as is compatible with a loyal service of God. If a human master asks for that which is opposed to the known will of the Divine Master the Christian conscience forthwith refuses service, it utters those words of the first Apostles, "We must obey God rather than man." What could be more perfect than the service rendered by the three children, or by Daniel, in the court of those eastern kings, until the time came when they were bidden consent to an act, to one act, of idolatry? Then the dignity of their previous service was apparent in their refusal to serve. The burning fiery furnace, the den of lions, were instantly chosen as a preferable alternative to one act of disobedience to God.

And it was in this sense alone that our Lord was among us as one that serveth. He was, indeed, the truest servant that mankind ever had; but He did not serve its errors, its delusions, its prejudices, its evil inclinations, while He did relieve its sorrows, while He did reinforce its weakness. He loved men far too well. He often served men when they repelled His service; He never paid compliments to their mistakes or to their passions; He never created popularity by ascribing to the people a wisdom or an infallibility which, as a matter of fact, it does not possess; and therefore His

service, when most devoted and disinterested, never for a moment degenerated into servility, because it was, primarily and before everything else, the service of the Father.

There are, thank God, no slaves in England such as there were in the ancient world. If any man is what is called a servant in this country, it is because he chooses to be one; his service is one side of a contract, and it can be put an end to whenever he or his employer pleases. This makes it, in fact, to be on a level with any other kind of occupation, since all who are honestly employed in gaining their livelihood or serving their fellow men are servants, if not of man, yet certainly, if they are Christians, of God. And yet some sort of stigma is understood to attach to "going out to service," as if it were an occupation unworthy of a free Christian man or woman. Now, this notion is really a shred of the old pagan thought about such things, hanging in tatters about our minds. But it is sometimes encouraged by masters or mistresses, who, if they were wary Christians ought to do better. An observant foreigner, not unfriendly to English ways, has remarked unfavourably upon the treatment which servants often meet with in English households, upon the distance at which they are kept by their employers, upon the want of consideration which they frequently meet with, upon the neglect of their highest interests. In by-gone days this was less the case than now. Then an old servant was often the friend of the family; the confidant of its older, the kindly adviser of its younger, members; while the money equivalent for service was never thought of on either side except at the quarter day. Then a service, devoted and generous on the one side, and valued and respected on the other, would often last for a whole lifetime, for it was at once a service and a friendship, in which intimacy was always possible because it was never presumed on. Now we have changed all this, at least too generally; all that gives service its dignity and beauty is stripped away, and it is reduced to an affair of salaries; and engagements are too frequently as brief as they are heartless. There are faults, no doubt, on both sides, and they would be corrected if both could be inspired with the spirit of service. It is no certificate of merit to be waited on; it is no indignity to wait upon another man. If our Lord were to appear at a great dinner

party we may reverently conjecture that He would take His part rather with the waiters in livery than with the guests sitting at table, although we know that once at least, at Cana of Galilee, He was among the guests. But that for which He would look, and which He would approve, would be the spirit of service, the spirit of the service in the servant and also in the master and the guests, a spirit which would more than bridge over the social interval between them by inspiring them with a reciprocal sense of dignity and obligation.

For, after all, the real question for us all is not what particular service we have to do, but how we do it. The difference between a drummer boy and a field marshal, between an office clerk and a prime minister, between the young curate and an archbishop, is as nothing compared with the difference between a man who has on his heart and conscience the sense of what it is to serve God and the man who has not. On the one side is Lucifer, the prince of rebellion, on the other that assembled multitude around the throne of the glorified Lamb, Whose praises, the very highest language of service, we have just been listening to. May God enable us to enter, this Advent, this Christmas, into this great lesson taught us by His blessed and incarnate Son, and to understand that, while the service of any but Himself is sooner or later, and inevitably, slavery, this service, be its outward form what it may, is most assuredly perfect freedom.

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